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# THE SASSOON DYNASTY



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(London, 1929)

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(London, 1939)

*etc.*





SIR PHILIP SASOON

# THE SASSOON DYNASTY

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By  
CECIL ROTH



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TO ADOLF HITLER  
FUEHRER OF THE GERMAN REICH

FOR TWO reasons I desire to inscribe your name at the beginning of this book. The first is, that I consider its topic to be a useful object-lesson to the unfortunate people whom you have misled into thinking themselves a pure and superior "race" (whatever that may mean). The most rudimentary political commonsense should make it obvious that the absorption of gifted foreign families cannot be other than an advantage for a civilized state. England and English life have in particular been enriched for centuries past by receiving fresh elements from other sources, and there can surely be no reason to regret a liberality that has endowed her with soldiers, philanthropists and poets such as the Sassoon family and many like it have produced. Germany under your guidance has deliberately set herself on the path not merely of self-destruction (which while her present temper lasts would be a peculiar boon to humanity at large) but of self-dementation.

In the second place, I am happy to have this opportunity to express once again, as publicly as I may, my profound execration and abhorrence, not merely as a Jew and an Englishman but as a human being, of you, your ideals, your ideas, your methods and all that you stand for. Should God punish the sins of the world by allowing you a momentary victory, I trust that this declaration will bring upon me the honour of the most drastic attention of your nauseous tools, for life in such circumstances would not be worth the having.

CECIL ROTH

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
	PREFACE . . . . .	11
I.	BAGHDAD . . . . .	17
II.	BOMBAY . . . . .	37
III.	THE SECOND GENERATION . . . . .	70
IV.	E. D. SASSOON & COMPANY . . . . .	95
V.	ENGLAND . . . . .	108
VI.	THE ROYAL BOX . . . . .	142
VII.	THE THIRD GENERATION . . . . .	165
VIII.	THE SASSOONS OF ASHLEY PARK . . . . .	190
IX.	THE FOURTH GENERATION . . . . .	207
X.	P.S. . . . .	232

## TABLES

THE SASSOONS BY GENERATIONS . . . . .	<i>Page</i> 69
THE HOUSE OF ELIAS DAVID SASSOON . . . . .	94
SIR ALBERT SASSOON AND HIS FAMILY . . . . .	164
THE SASSOONS OF ASHLEY PARK . . . . .	189
THE EXTINCTION OF THE HOUSE OF SASSOON . . . . .	206
THE HOUSE OF SASSOON . . . . .	<i>folding plate at end of volume</i>



*For I am alone, a dweller among men  
Hunger'd for what my heart shall never say.*

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

## ILLUSTRATIONS

SIR PHILIP SASSOON	.	.		<i>Frontispiece</i>
				<i>Facing page</i>
DAVID SASSOON	.	.	.	44
SIR ALBERT SASSOON	.	.	.	88
REUBEN SASSOON	.	.	.	124
THE SASSOON MAUSOLEUM, BRIGHTON	.			164
SIR EDWARD SASSOON	.	.	.	182
RACHEL BEER AND HER HUSBAND	.		.	200
REGINALD SASSOON	.	.	.	220
PORT LYMPNE	.	.	.	246



## PREFACE

THIS volume is the record of a very remarkable family. I am not particularly concerned with the fact that it amassed, and in recent years lost, a great deal of money—a commonplace and (as it seems to me, since I cannot emulate it) somewhat vulgar occupation. But in the course of my inquiries I have been struck by two aspects of its history, apart from its rise to fortune—its astonishing metamorphosis in the course of a single generation from Orientals of the Haroun-al-Raschid period to highly sophisticated members of the Marlborough House set in London: and the fidelity with which it presents, in its rise and in its decline, a microcosm of contemporary social history.

It is usual to refer to the Sassoons as the Rothschilds of the East. They were nothing of the kind. In the first place, the Rothschilds were essentially financiers, whereas the Sassoons were essentially merchants, with subsidiary interests as manufacturers. In the second, the House of Rothschild, neatly distributed among five different centres, never lost its unity; the Sassoons, untidily scattered about the Levant, did. In the third, the background and progress of the two families were entirely different. The Rothschilds were Europeans, their ancestors having lived in the Occident from time immemorial, whereas the Sassoons had never

strayed from Asia (so far as it is possible to ascertain) until they were brought to England in the nineteenth century. But there was a more significant difference than this. The Rothschilds were of undistinguished origin, the first of the family who emerges into the light of history being an ordinary money-changer of commonplace antecedents who flourished towards the close of the eighteenth century. At this time the progenitor of the Sassoons was a Prince of the Captivity in Baghdad, as his ancestors had been before him. It is not therefore so remarkable as would appear at first blush that, when the younger generation came to England later on, they were able to take their rank in Society and at Court as to the manner born. They were not uneasy intruders, as some of their contemporaries were; they were re-entering as it were into their birthright.

Nevertheless, it was a far cry from Baghdad to Windsor, from the turban and oriental robes which the family had worn even in India to the top-hat and frock-coat with which they paraded Pall Mall, from the flowing Arabic periods in which they were formerly so adept to the terseness of English prose. Yet the transition was made with extraordinary rapidity, assuredly equalled by no other family in history. David Sassoon, the founder of the House, was an Oriental patriarch, albeit at the same time a good business-man. His sons, most of whom never knew the discomforts of occidental dress until they arrived at manhood, later cut a figure in London society, and were among the most prominent personalities in the Royal Enclosure that rotated about

King Edward VII. The next generation entered Parliament and intermarried with the nobility. The next flaunts the most English of contemporary English poets, the most civilized of Commissioners of Public Works, and a steeplechase rider whose death was considered an irreparable loss to English sport. It is an amazing record. What family could have been less English in its tastes a century ago? What family has produced members who are more so to-day?

Apart from the historical interest of the subject, I have a faint feeling that it has a scientific value as well. It is not very often that one has the opportunity of examining the influence of heredity and environment with such precision and in the case of a family that can be traced so exactly. I am thinking not only of small matters such as pigmentation, but of mental characteristics as well. As the reader will see, if he has the hardihood to go so far, one of the children of the founder of the Sassoon family showed in his youth a taste for amateur journalism and in maturity an unanticipated passion for the English countryside. His daughter was the famous Mrs Rachel Beer, the only woman on record who edited two English Sunday papers at the same time, and his grandson Siegfried Sassoon, who has described the rural scene in jewelled words more precious by far than his ancestors' gems. Again: while none of the Sassoon clan of the older generation was conspicuous for artistic sensibility (I am intentionally erring on the side of understatement) intermarriage with the Rothschilds, with their unusually keen perception in this direction, pro-

duced in Sir Philip Sassoon a man whose exceptional artistic taste (whatever may have been the case with his political abilities) was a national asset.

It is this amazing metamorphosis that I have endeavoured to describe in these pages. If my account is not more satisfactory, part of the responsibility at least lies in the curious convention by which the members of well-known families neither make use of their records nor allow access to them to others. (This is enough, I trust, to indicate that there is nothing "official" about this volume, in the production of which the Sassoon family has had no part whatsoever. I almost feel inclined to add, in consequence of this, the conventional warning that all the characters in this work are entirely fictional.) Another difficulty in my way has been caused by the disorganization of certain libraries, in which I was certain to find much information in convenient form, as an indirect consequence of the War. The time will come, I hope, when this preliminary effort will be succeeded by a more sober study, by more competent hands and based upon a richer material.

Some grateful acknowledgements must be recorded, if only to counterbalance these disclaimers. Mr S. B. Harris, of Brighton, was good enough to collect for me locally a good deal of useful information, and I owe to Mr Bernard Falk almost all that I have been able to discover about Rachel Beer. Mr Paul Goodman, with typical generosity, furnished me with some interesting reminiscences and records. Mr Paul Emden gave me much help, especially on the financial and commercial side,

besides compiling the genealogical tables with a competence which overcame all their intricacies. Above all, Mrs Alice Dudeney was good enough to put at my disposal a series of letters sent her by the late Sir Philip Sassoon, which present a new picture of that somewhat pathetic character, very different from the pampered millionaire of popular imagination. I have drawn on these to a large extent in the last chapter, and have dispensed with any further indication of provenance. My gratitude is of course to be interpreted in every case as a lively sense of anticipation of future favours.

CECIL ROTH

*February 1941*





## CHAPTER I

### BAGHDAD

THOUGH its splendours were sadly tarnished and its odours magnificently enhanced, Baghdad on the eve of the French Revolution was not very different from the fabulous city of Haroun-al-Raschid. It was no longer, of course, the capital of a sprawling Empire: that questionable distinction lapsed nine centuries before, when the Commanders of the Faithful had become puppets in the hands of their Turkish bodyguard and the distant provinces had fallen away like ripe figs from their former allegiance. Thereafter it swaggered fitfully through the generations until the thirteenth century, when the Mongol hordes overran Mesopotamia, annihilated the Arab civilization, and broke down the astounding irrigational system that had existed from time immemorial with as much insouciance as Spanish Christians. Henceforth, what had formerly been one of the granaries of the world was converted into a sun-parched steppe, varied by great malarious swamps and tiny patches of arable land, where with the aid of his long-suffering wives the peasant waged an unequal war with the sands, the mosquitoes and the tax-collectors. The province was wasted by sporadic warfare between the rival Turkish and Persian monarchies, with only occasional inter-

loping from third parties, and its few cities were periodically put to the sword with all the refinements of an unmechanized age. Occasionally, Baghdad knew again the dignity of being a capital—not now of a great Empire but of a paltry Mongol state.

When at last under Sultan Murad IV (a relatively monogamous contemporary of Louis XIII of France) the authority of the Sublime Porte was definitely (or rather definitively) reasserted, its interest in the province was distressingly sordid. From the middle of the eighteenth century, power was left in the hands of a succession of local *valis* (i.e. civil governors), mostly Georgian freedmen, who are known to historians, if not to history, as the Slave Pashas. These belated Satraps misruled with sublime incompetence from Merdin to the Persian Gulf, enjoyed so much independence that it was superfluous for them to renounce their allegiance, and oppressed their subjects to their hearts', and almost to their purses', content. Yet the ancient city of Baghdad still reared its minarets like jewelled fingers pointing the way to a sophisticated Moslem heaven, and gorgeous tiled buildings dating back to the time of the Arabian Nights could still be found here and there in the malodorous wilderness of brick.

Still the old caravan routes met here—from the upland country to the north, or through the gap of Khurasan, or across the desert—to the Mediterranean westwards, to the Holy Cities of Islam to the south. From the south-east, along the Tigris, primitive boats unchanged since the days of Nebuchadnezzar brought the produce of India: and

outside the walls sardonic camels, their lucky charms dangling from their necks, chewed the cud perpetually in the intervals of their long trips across the sands to Gaza and Egypt. A few Europeans might occasionally be met—English merchants in incongruous knee-breeches attempting to exchange Manchester cotton-goods and Sheffield cutlery for indigoes and Oriental carpets, or East Indian adventurers hoping for returns still greater than could be achieved in Pondicherry and Madras, or *soi-disant* experts employed for the manufacture of gunpowder and cannon. But it was an Oriental city—unspoiled, unageing and unswept.

A Bridge of Boats joined the two banks of the river. To the south lived the Arabs and the rest of the Moslem proletariat, industriously begetting children to be carried off by 'malaria and plague. To the north, on what was termed the Persian bank, resided the nobility, the Christians and the Jews, each section in its own quarter. The last-mentioned—they numbered some five or six thousand at the most, but the figures given in the various sources are distressingly unreliable—had formed part of the background of the country from time immemorial. It was now some twenty-five hundred years since Nebuchadnezzar had transplanted their fathers thither from Judea after the capture of Jerusalem. Primitive anti-Zionists of a hundred generations before Zionism, they had remained behind when Ezra and his companions returned to build up again their national home in Palestine. They had accustomed themselves patiently to the rule of the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Parthians, the

Arabs, the Mongols, and now the Turks. All had disappeared in turn, but the Jews had remained behind—the oldest, the only unchanging, element in a floating population, still in the eighteenth century precisely similar in every detail to their forebears who struck undignified postures in the Arabian Nights.

They were not the wealthiest element in the city—the two thousand Armenians had that distinction, and enjoyed a corresponding degree of unpopularity, as well as of the delicate fiscal attentions of the Pasha. (One Armenian, it was said in Turkey, was a match for four Greeks, and one Greek for four Jews.) The majority of them were perpetually on the verge of starvation, eking out a sublimely precarious livelihood from reciprocal charity and other menial occupations. Yet there was among them a sprinkling of merchant princes, who had their stored booths in every bazaar, were to be encountered and heard in all the principal caravanserais, and had a prominent share, with members of other racial minorities, in money-changing, banking (such as it was) and the administration of the monopolies from which the *valis* obtained a good deal of their resources. It was a completely Arabized community—for had not their ancestors dwelt among Arabs (or, rather, the Arabs from the heart of the Peninsula dwelt around their ancestors, the first arrivals) for upwards of a thousand years? They spoke Arabic among themselves, introduced Arabic into their religious services, and wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters for their correspondence. Their social life was that of

Arabs, their cuisine was Arab, they adopted Arab superstitions, and even such institutions as the harem had become established among them in a modified form.

It was at the beginning of the last quarter of the eighteenth century—when George III's head was still balanced and Louis XVI's still attached—that there first emerges among this element that somewhat shadowy figure who founded its most remarkable family. It was customary for the Vali of Baghdad to appoint his own *Saraf Bashi*, or Chief Treasurer, and (as elsewhere in the Arab world for untold generations past) this official was frequently, or generally, a Jew. Under Ahmet Pasha, who rose to office at the beginning of the reign of Abdul-Hamid I (1773–1789), the office was filled by one Sassoon or Sason ben<sup>1</sup> Saleh ben David ben Jacob ben Saleh ben David, whose offspring subsequently called themselves, after their progenitor, "Sassoon." The name means "joy," and the proud parents had probably chosen it in part as a happy augury for the infant's future, in part to signify their appreciation of male offspring, perhaps retarded. As the principal component part of a surname, the appellation, slightly modified, has been borne by many persons of high distinction in Jewish history and letters. There was Solomon ibn Susan "the mighty hammer," patron of the Jewish community at Toledo in the twelfth century; his son and successor Joseph, favourite of King Alfonso VIII of Castile, who built a stately Synagogue in that city; and his son in turn, a second

<sup>1</sup> Ben (in the feminine *bath*) like the Arab *ibn*, signifies "son of."

Solomon, third of his line to be looked up to by the Toledan Jewry of the golden age as their Prince. Later on, the family produced martyrs, mathematicians, philanthropists, Rabbis, casuists, physicians, ascetics, and scholars. (One of the latter, a seventeenth-century Cabbalist named Abraham Sassoon, boasted that he could trace his descent back to Prince Shephatiah, fifth son of King David.) After it attained prominence, the Sassoon clan (or its dutiful panegyrists) endeavoured to link itself up with these remote, but temptingly distinguished, homonyms. In consequence, it was driven to postulate a wholly fictitious family history. It was assumed that, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain by the Catholic monarchs in 1492, their ancestors emigrated eastward—first (with the main body of exiles) to Salonica, then to Constantinople, then to Mesopotamia. But there is no particle of positive evidence to support this colourful story, which in fact robs the Sassoon saga of a great deal of its fascination. All probabilities and evidences go to suggest rather that it is descended from the immemorably ancient Jewish communities of Mesopotamia settled there since the days of the Babylonian Exile, and that it came into contact with European life for the first time when the nineteenth century was well advanced.

The Pasha's Treasurer was *ipso facto* the principal person among the Jews of Baghdad, and was formally recognized by the Government as their "Nasi," or Prince. The common people of the city went even further, and termed him the King of the Jews. In this title, there was the echo of bygone days, when

it had approximated in a vague sort of manner to the truth. During the periods of Parthian and Persian supremacy, and even under the Caliphs, the Jews of Mesopotamia had enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, under the rule of the *Resh Galutha* (Exilarch) or Prince of the Captivity, descended from Jehoiachin, the exiled King of Judah, who had been permitted to set himself up as a Babylonian country gentleman. He enjoyed a semi-royal state, the ample judicial authority that he exercised being combined with spectacular prerogatives of the sort that appealed to the Oriental mind. Every fifth day, accompanied by an ample escort of horsemen, Moslem as well as Jews, he went to pay a formal visit at Court. He was attired in luxurious robes, of semi-regal splendour, and heralds proclaimed his approach through the streets along which he was to pass. When he appeared in the Divan, the sovereign would rise to greet him, and would place him on a throne opposite his own, while the other princes in attendance remained standing as a sign of deference until he was seated. The common people of every creed called him "Saidna ibn Daoud"—"Our Lord, Son of David"—and any man, Christian, Moslem or Jew, who failed to rise before him when he passed through the bazaars was punished with a hundred stripes.

A pale shadow of this fabulous splendour (the reality of which, not quite so dazzling as the memory, had ended in fact with the twelfth century) continued to attach to the person of the *Nasi* who was appointed at the head of Baghdad Jewry. Hence another legend was added to the over-scintillating



aureole with which the house of Sassoon was later to be adorned: and the family was linked up to the Princes of the Captivity of old, and through them once more to the seed of King David himself.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the industrious *Nasi* of the eighteenth century was a different being from the resplendent Exilarch of the eighth, that the office (now imitated or parodied in neighbouring cities) had been shorn of most of its glory, and that it was kept in being by the authorities in its truncated state mainly as an instrument for pecuniary exactions, which were relentless and intolerable. But nevertheless, the aroma of greatness still clung to it. The *Nasi* took a foremost part in the self-government of the Jews of Baghdad, holding the title of Sheikh, occupying the first place in the Synagogue, and leading in the formulation of new communal regulations and ordinances. He had the right of punishing misdemeanour and even apostasy (except of course to Islam) by fire or the bastinado—according to one account, even by death. His co-religionists pointed proudly to the office as an irrefutable proof that, whatever Christian missionaries might say, the sceptre had not quite departed from Judah.

About Sassoon ben Saleh himself we know little. He was born at the end of the first half of the eighteenth century (probably in 1749) of an affluent family which as has been seen could trace its descent back authentically for at least five generations and hypothetically for many more. (The ancestral residence, known as Beit Abu-Rubin, may still be

<sup>1</sup> The coat-of-arms of the Sassoon family embodies a reference to this legendary descent: see below, page 134.

seen in the old Jewish quarter of Baghdad.) His father, Saleh ben David, died in the Great Plague of 1773, still remembered as *El Douaba el Kebir*, when two-thirds of the population of the city was swept away—one of the constant succession of natural visitations that devastated Baghdad in those days, so much more pleasing than the unnatural visitations of our own time. There is still extant the document whereby after his death his widow, Hannah bat Benjamin, was reinstated in her dower, in accordance with the extremely sensible prescriptions of Talmudic law, by which the internal affairs of Baghdad Jewry were regulated.

Even at this time, their twenty-five-year-old son Sassoon was prominent in public life, and possibly was already *Saraf Bashi* and leader of the Jewish community; he is spoken of in the documents in question as “Sheikh Sassoon” in terms that indicate the high esteem in which he was held and appear to justify this deduction. In any case, even if he was not in office then, he certainly was seven years later, in 1782, when he was in his early thirties. This leads us to an important conclusion. It is unlikely that so young a man would have been appointed to these positions or been given this honorific title purely on his own merits. The probabilities are then that they were traditionally filled by members of the family, intermittently at least, and that he succeeded his own father on the latter’s death. Carrying the probabilities a stage further back, one is perhaps justified in the assumption, reinforced by a somewhat vague oral tradition, that the office was quasi-hereditary in the family,

members of which had filled it, one after the other (with occasional intervals), for some generations past. It was obviously, in any case, no clan of parvenus.<sup>1</sup>

Sassoon ben Saleh must have been like so many of his descendants a man of particular ability, for he managed to remain in office and favour throughout the period of the rule of Ahmet Pasha (an achievement no less delicate, but assuredly more hazardous, than that of his grandsons in retaining the affections of a King of England). The latter followed the example of the rulers of most of the neighbouring Pashaliks in paying no attention whatsoever to instructions from Constantinople and remaining in a state of semi-overt rebellion. At last, after several unsuccessful attempts, the Sultan asserted his authority and managed to eject him in favour of Suleiman Pasha, formerly Vali of Basra, a rather more attractive figure. Sassoon ben Saleh still retained his positions, continuing in office for at least forty years in all, surviving all the revolutions and effectively protecting his co-religionists until his last days from the worst of the intermittent persecutions. He joined zealously, moreover, in every activity of the Jewish community, religious and administrative, and a grateful poet recorded in mellifluous verses that might have been

<sup>1</sup> An apology may seem necessary for this string of hypotheses, but unfortunately they are inevitable. Contrary to what is generally believed, the Jews are a most unhistorically minded people as far as recent generations are concerned. Their records are everywhere scanty, and in very many cases non-existent: and very few families have preserved a consistent account of their ancestors for more than three or four generations back.

composed in the eleventh century, the share of this "Diadem of the Exile" in constructing the Great Synagogue, by favour of the benignant Suleiman Pasha. (This place of worship, still standing, has in use to the present day certain liturgical appurtenances that he presented to it.)

The Sheikh had married (it was probably not his first or only wife) the daughter of a former *Nasi* of Baghdad Jewry, with whose family the Sassoons were to intermarry thereafter, with bewildering reiteration, in every generation. She is styled, in the original record, "Amam, daughter of the illustrious Prince of Israel, Abraham ben David ben Jeshua Gubbay" (the name, better transliterated "Gabbai," signifies "treasurer," of communal rather than public funds). They had, apart from other children, who need not concern us here (though some of the posterity ultimately drifted to England), a son named David, born in 1793, who became known as David ben Sassoon and later, when he reached a land where surnames were customary, as David Sassoon. He was the founder of the fabulous family which is to be the subject of this volume.

Before we go further, one point must be accentuated. It is customary to call the Sassoons the Rothschilds of the East (cursory allusion has been made to this above), and to compare David with Mayer Amschel, the founder of that house. But the comparison fails at the crucial point. The progress of the Sassoons was in many ways even more remarkable than that of their great contemporaries of Frankfort. The ancestors of the latter had after all

been settled in Europe, and adjusted to European life as long as any other Europeans—perhaps for as much as two thousand years (the Jews of the Rhineland are the oldest element of the local population, having been settled there many generations before the Roman province fell a prey to the Teutonic barbarians who still occupy it). The Sassoons, on the other hand, had never been other than Asiatics, and to acclimatize themselves in Europe as they did in the course of a single generation was an almost incredible achievement. But they were helped in this by an advantage that the Rothschilds had never had. The latter were new-comers to any sort of prominence or public life. Amschel Moses Rothschild, Mayer Amschel's father, was the first of the clan to attain the slightest degree of distinction even in the Frankfort Ghetto—and that simply as a petty merchant and money-changer. Real eminence was attained only two generations later, with those prodigious grandchildren of his who became the financial dictators of Europe, and was dependent on that fact. But the position of David Sassoon was quite different. He belonged to a patrician family, settled in the fabulous East from time immemorial. Both on his father's side and on his mother's, he was descended from the last successors of the Princes of the Captivity, whose office can be dimly traced for a hundred generations, linking up through the rose-coloured mists of antiquity with the royal house of David. When a century after his birth his posterity began to hob-nob with the nobility and to entertain crowned heads and princes of the blood royal, they were simply

re-asserting their station in life—they were not in any sense of the term rising above it.<sup>1</sup>

To occupy any sort of office in remote corners of the Turkish empire was insalubrious, and had life insurance then been usual the premiums in such cases would have risen to dizzy heights. If the *vali's* tenure of office were hazardous, he at least had the satisfaction of passing on the uncertainty to his subordinates; and sometimes, higher authority might deign to interest itself in them. As early as 1774 a legal document records how the "Sheikh Sassoon" was unable to produce certain documents before the Jewish tribunal, in the family case referred to above, because he was in no position to show himself openly in public or to come and go as he desired "from fear of the ruler of the city, may his name be blotted out!" (The last pleasing execration presumably refers to the ruling *Vali*, at that time indulging in an exercise in practical anti-Semitism.) At his house in Baghdad, a secret passage was built in the thickness of the wall, for use in emergency; and in the gates, as in those of most of the Jewish houses of the city, there might be seen great nails which the Arab tyrants used for occasional torturings. Moreover, there were constant intrigues, both in the provincial capital and at the Golden Horn, where there was a tradition of such things going back well beyond the days of the Turkish conquest. The man was both adroit and fortunate who could manage to survive all these pitfalls: and towards the end of his days, old

<sup>1</sup> Because of this, the erudite German anti-Semitic handbook, *Semi-Gotha*, lists the Sassoon family among the Princes.

Sheikh Sassoon, after having been able to weather all political storms for at least forty years, at last found himself outmatched by one of his rivals.

About the year 1811, after many highly lucrative years of office, Suleiman Pasha, *Vali* of Baghdad, broke into overt rebellion. He refused to furnish the Sultan with money and troops, was declared a rebel, and sentenced to death. But this made little difference to him, as he was strong enough to withstand any military attack; while all the secret emissaries who came to Baghdad on behalf of the central government were denounced to him by his spies and put to death. Sheikh Sassoon continued to serve him loyally, if without enthusiasm. But at last, after this state of affairs had lasted for about ten years, one of the Sultan's favourites, Hallat Effendi, took charge of operations. So as to save the public treasury the expense and hazards of a military campaign he considerably set a trap for the rebellious *Vali* through the medium of Sheikh Sassoon's great rival at Baghdad, Ezekiel ibn Rahel Gubbay, known as Jecheskel Bagdadi, the richest banker in the city. The plot was successful, Suleiman Pasha was captured, and Hallat Effendi had the indescribable pleasure of being able to send his head to his master in Constantinople as a souvenir of the event. As a result of this brilliant military achievement, he was all but omnipotent henceforth at the Sublime Porte. His gratitude to his Jewish coadjutor was unbounded. The latter went back with him to the capital, where he became Court Banker and Treasurer. He naturally worked hand in glove with his protector who now, as Keeper of

the Privy Seal, was amassing an enormous fortune by selling state offices to the highest bidder.

The new *Vali* of Baghdad was Daoud Pasha—the last of the slave *valis*—appointed about 1821. It was a family affair, and Ezekiel's brother, Ezra, was now nominated *Saraf Bashi* and Prince of the Jews in old Sheikh Sassoon's place. However, the head that wore any sort of diadem rested uneasy in the Turkish Empire until it rested for good. There was endemic rivalry at Constantinople between Jews and Armenians, whom the outside world bracketed together. The Ibn Rahel brothers opposed as a matter of course the influence of the latter element in state affairs, and drove Kazaz-Aretun, the Armenian Director of the Mint, into exile. The latter took his revenge, and stirred up the Sultan himself to take action. In 1826, the two brothers, both the Court Banker and the Prince of the Captivity, were arrested and strangled.

This did not imply that Sheikh Sassoon returned to office; he was indeed too old for this, and his son, David, now thirty-six years of age, had begun to fill the part in public affairs that had hitherto fallen to his father.

Of the previous life of the new head of the family, his early years, his upbringing, his initiation to business and public life, very little is on record. That he survived childhood—not by any means a universal achievement in those days of pestilence and famine—points to a certain physical hardihood of which there is ample subsequent evidence. (Natural selection was constantly at work before modern medicine disturbed the balance.) He



presumably received the training of any other youth belonging to the upper class of Baghdad Jewry in those days. He had the conventional education of the pious Jew, not overlooking the intricacies of the Talmud and the mysteries of the Zohar. He had a good grounding in more than one language. Hebrew was the language of religion, Arabic of the environment, Turkish of the government, Persian of trade through the mountain-passes to the north: and he spoke them all, turning the knowledge to good use.

He was only fifteen years of age when his father found him a bride in the person of Hannah, daughter of Abdullah Joseph, who was without doubt of even more tender years. With his domestic life thus adjusted, he could begin to forge his career, without any of the unpleasant distractions on which modernists dwell so insistently. Presumably, he entered his father's counting-house, dignified in retrospect by the name of a "banking establishment," and there was introduced into the perplexities of Oriental trade and finance. When he emerges to prominence in the third decade of the nineteenth century, when the breadth of modernity had faintly begun to disturb the Pashalik, he was a notable figure in the public life as well as the business community of the city.

It is obvious that the old Sheikh Sassoon had intended this son of his to follow him in his offices of *Saraf Bashi* and *Nasi* of the Jews, which as we have seen were in all probability quasi-hereditary in the family. Thus, on the fall of the Gubbay brothers in 1826, it would have been natural for

the young man to be installed in the position that his father had enjoyed under successive *valis* for so many years. But he was disappointed in this. Daoud Pasha was not only the last, but also the most tyrannical of the Slave Governors. His maltreatment of the Jews in his Pashalik was particularly brutal. His predecessors had of course persecuted them incidentally, mainly for revenue: he elevated maladministration into a system. It was estimated afterwards that during the period of his rule they dwindled in number, owing to persecution, plague, civil war and inundation, by some four-fifths.

However, an official who rose to power through intrigue could generally be deposed by the same means. There is evidence that David Sassoon was not content to acquiesce tamely either in his deposition or in the maltreatment of his co-religionists. He made representations to the Sublime Porte, calling attention to the *Vali's* misgovernment and agitating for his dismissal. In due course (but it was ten years later) steps were taken, Daoud was deposed, and Mesopotamia was brought under direct and effective Turkish rule, as it remained for about eighty years. But in the meantime, in 1829, the news of what had happened became known in the city. The *Vali* swore revenge, began a thoroughgoing persecution of the Jews on a more systematic plan than before, and, of course, gave orders for this arch-enemy to be hanged.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are some other, slightly less dramatic, accounts of the reasons that led David Sassoon to leave Baghdad. One is, that the endemic persecution of the Jews (not directed against him in particular) became intolerable; another, that he fled

It was decidedly no time for the young man to indulge in the Cabbalistical meditations into which he had been initiated in his youth. Accompanied by his octogenarian father, and probably assisted by disguise and judicious bribery, David Sassoon escaped from Baghdad by night. Once they had passed through the closely-guarded city gates, the greatest danger was over. They now managed to make their way down the river to the port of Basra, at the head of the Persian Gulf (the Bassorah of the Arabian Nights). Here David's family, already numerous, subsequently joined him. Details of the journey are not known, but it was obviously hazardous in the extreme. Later on, the family claimed that they had been vouchsafed special protection from Heaven, which they went so far as to qualify as miraculous.<sup>1</sup>

Basra was under the rule of another *Vali*, semi-independent but subordinate to his confrère at Baghdad. Here, too, then, there was constant danger. But not far off, on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf, was the port of Bushire, founded by Nadir Shah in 1736 as the base for the embryonic (and, in the event, still-born) Persian navy, and now the principal emporium of the entire region. It had gradually supplanted the old port of Rishire, which had served as a quarry for

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from the Plague. I have tried to combine all that can be ascertained, despite the complete absence of documentary evidence, into a consistent story, while conscious that it may be corrected in details.

<sup>1</sup> Some accounts omit Basra from David Sassoon's peregrinations, suggesting that he went direct from Baghdad to Bushire.

its buildings, and even Bandar Abbas, which in the palmy days of the seventeenth century had been the principal maritime city of Persia. In 1759, during the Seven Years' War, the English factory at this latter place had been inconsiderately destroyed by the French, and in consequence the trading activities of the East India Company were transferred to its upstart rival. It was now at its prime, boasting even a British agent, and for a dispossessed business-man from Iraq it offered irresistible attractions. Hither, therefore, the fugitives transferred themselves: and here, towards the close of 1829, old Sheikh Sassoon ben Saleh died, upwards of eighty years of age, worn out by his recent tribulations.

His son, David, henceforth occupies the stage alone, the master of his own fate and lord of his own destiny. His new place of residence lay at the parting of the ways. One might trek inland, to Shiraz and Ispahan and the other fabulous cities of the Shah's dominions. One might board a felucca and cross the Persian Gulf to El Katif or Bahrein or the desolate strand of Arabia. One might (if one were foolhardy) return westward, to Basra and the land of the Two Rivers. But the East, too, beckoned. Bushire was now the centre of the activities in Persia of the East India Company. There was increasing traffic down the Gulf, towards the Arabian Ocean and Sind. East India merchantmen, flying the complicated Union Jack, were constantly leaving the port, setting their course in a south-easterly direction, towards these gateways to fortune. Before long David Sassoon's business

interests extended as far as Bombay. In 1832, an important business enterprise brought him to the city on a visit. He realized its beauty and its promise. He saw British rule, and, remembering Daoud Pasha, appreciated its blessings. He went back to Bushire to assemble his family. A year later, he returned to Bombay for good.

## CHAPTER II

### BOMBAY

BOMBAY, when it first gave hospitality to David Sassoon and his family, was a raw city, which for some time past had been growing with all the rapidity of a town in the American Middle West in the heyday of the period of expansion. When it had come into British hands nearly two hundred years before, as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, it was a trading-factory of some 10,000 inhabitants, mainly (it was said) fugitives and vagabonds. In 1832, it numbered 200,000 (to-day, there are upwards of a million). There were Hindus, Jews, Armenians, Parsees, Arabs, Portuguese, and half-castes, together with a few European and native troops and a handful of Englishmen, whose inability to support the climate throughout the year alone made possible the spectacular successes in commercial life of some of the other elements. The British victory over the Mahrattas of the hinterland in 1803-5, and again in 1817, had opened the way to a period of unrestricted development; a great fire in 1803, which swept away the old city, made reconstruction possible (this being India and not England) on rational lines; and in Mountstuart Elphinstone, Governor from 1819 to

1827, the province was blessed with one of the most vigorous and far-seeing of British colonial administrators of the time.

By the beginning of the reign of William IV—the period with which we are dealing—Bombay had become the gateway to India: to the new India which was entering upon a fresh chapter in its history as part of the British Empire.

Through that gateway there passed all sorts and conditions of men, seeking their fortune in the expanse beyond. The restoration of peace in Europe after the Napoleonic adventures, and the gradual process miscalled the Industrial Revolution, had brought about a tremendous expansion in trade the repercussions of which were felt throughout the globe. In England, the inventions of Hargreaves, Arkwright, Crompton and Watts had revolutionized the spinning industry, and Lancashire was now the loom of the whole world. Of its production, a great part was shipped through the gateway to India, to be draped about the loins of the teeming millions of the sub-continent. Not long since, the abolition of the East India Company's trading monopoly had thrown open the doors, and private enterprise at last had its chance.

Among those who took advantage of the fresh opportunities that thus offered themselves were, of course, Jews. To consider the migration of David Sassoon and his family from Baghdad to India as an isolated fact would place the family history entirely out of perspective. The Indian prospect always beckoned to the ambitious youth of Meso-

potamia—indeed, as long as eight hundred years before the rise of the Sassoons, a Hebrew moralist of Baghdad had observed that everyone who wanted to become rich emigrated to India. In the ninth century, probably (though the more romantic among their descendants antedated the episode to the period before the fall of Jerusalem) the Jews had established themselves on the Malabar coast: and, when Vasco da Gama arrived in Anchediva in 1497, after his adventurous pioneering journey round the Cape of Good Hope, he was greeted, somewhat to his disgust, by a long-bearded Hebrew from Poland who had got there before him. (The unfortunate infidel was of course made to realize the error of his ways, and tortured until he consented to be baptized and to pilot the Portuguese flotilla in Indian waters.)

The medieval migration was however sporadic: it was only in the nineteenth century that it attained relatively considerable proportions and resulted in an important displacement of population. Improvement in communications, development of trade, the beginning of the liberal era, and even the attempts to suppress it, all contributed to bring about a great migratory movement in every part of the Old World. Irish poured out in an unending stream to colonize the United States, Germans showed unusual lucidity by settling anywhere outside Germany, Italians were enticed by the prospects of the Argentine, Chinamen spread throughout the Far East. The Jews (specially affected by the persistence of the *furor teutonicus* on the one hand and by the spread of the *pax britannica* on the other)



were influenced by this universal travel-fever to a conspicuous extent—though probably not more so than the Irish. From Germany especially, there was a remarkable tide of migration, which resulted in the creation of new Jewish communities all over the English-speaking world, especially on the ampler side of the Atlantic Ocean. (It was a movement of population even more remarkable qualitatively than quantitatively: from Frankfort alone, there were dispersed about the world families of the calibre of the Rothschilds, the Sterns, the Schiffs, the Speyers, the Schusters, and a host of others with initials other than S, remarkable in every walk of life.) In addition to this westward movement in and from Europe, there was an eastward movement in the lesser, but nevertheless dense, Jewry of Iraq, ambitious scions of which now pushed forth in an unending stream to seek their fortune in India and beyond—in some cases with conspicuous success. Accordingly, in the same way as a chain of German (*Ashkenazi*) synagogues was established in the lands bordering on the Atlantic, a lesser but at the same time considerable chain of Oriental (*Sephardi*) communities came into being on the coasts of the Pacific and Indian oceans. In many cases, they were grouped around some single outstanding family of merchant-princes, who established great businesses, built up vast fortunes, and in the end occasionally received English titles. Thus (besides the Sassoons of Bombay) there were the families of Ezekiel, David and Ezra in Calcutta, that of Meyer in Singapore, and so on. The two streams of migration—westward from Central Europe, eastward from

Iraq and Turkey—met in one or two cities on the Pacific coast of the United States, such as Seattle, where later on Jews of either origin settled down side by side.

David Sassoon's translocation was not therefore an isolated phenomenon, an unprecedented adventure. He was caught up, rather early, in an eddy of this universal stream of migration which was responsible in the first half of the nineteenth century for such vast displacements of population throughout the world (and the suppression of which, in the first half of the twentieth century, seems to be having the same unfortunate effect as the stoppage of the safety-valve in any other delicate piece of machinery). On the other hand, of the pioneers in the Pacific, none succeeded more brilliantly than the Sassoons, and none, moreover, achieved such extraordinary results in the second stage of their pilgrimage, when they turned back again towards the west.

The Bombay to which David Sassoon arrived was not externally prepossessing. It was not yet indeed a manufacturing town—that was to be a development of the second half of the century, the house that he founded playing a prominent part in it. But the absence of smoke was paralleled by the absence, too, of the splendid public buildings that now adorn its principal streets—another process in which the family participated—as well as of the amenities which alone seem to make it endurable at the present day. A visiting poet, on the eve of his departure from India, apostrophized the city in a far from complimentary fashion:

Adieu, Bombay! May I forget the ever-  
Pestiferous hole, all other pests excelling  
In dust, mosquitoes, pariah-dogs and liver  
Not Milton's limbo would be worse to dwell  
in.

From the business point of view, too, the physiognomy of Bombay was entirely different in 1832 and to-day. Among the native community, the most memorable name thus far had been that of the Parsee, Hormasji Bomanji, who at the time of his death six years previously was said to be worth £2,000,000 (the sum was probably exaggerated to an enormous extent), and who had given a famous entertainment in Lowji Castle just before. His family was still maintaining his tradition. Of the European merchants, the greatest was John Skinner, who was to die in 1844 oblivious of the fact that the dignified Jew whom he patronized would be remembered long after his own name was forgotten. There were numerous important English houses besides his, but only two of them were still in business by the end of the century—those of Forbes & Co. and Ritchie Steuart & Co. Two years before David Sassoon's arrival, the *Hugh Lindsay* had made history as the first steamship to undertake the trip to Suez, thus cutting short the journey to Europe for those who had courage and endurance for the journey through the baking sands of Egypt to the Mediterranean. But the overland route still retained a certain popularity, the time taken to reach London being four months and the cost some £120. Throughout these years, however, commerce was reaping the advantages of a constant

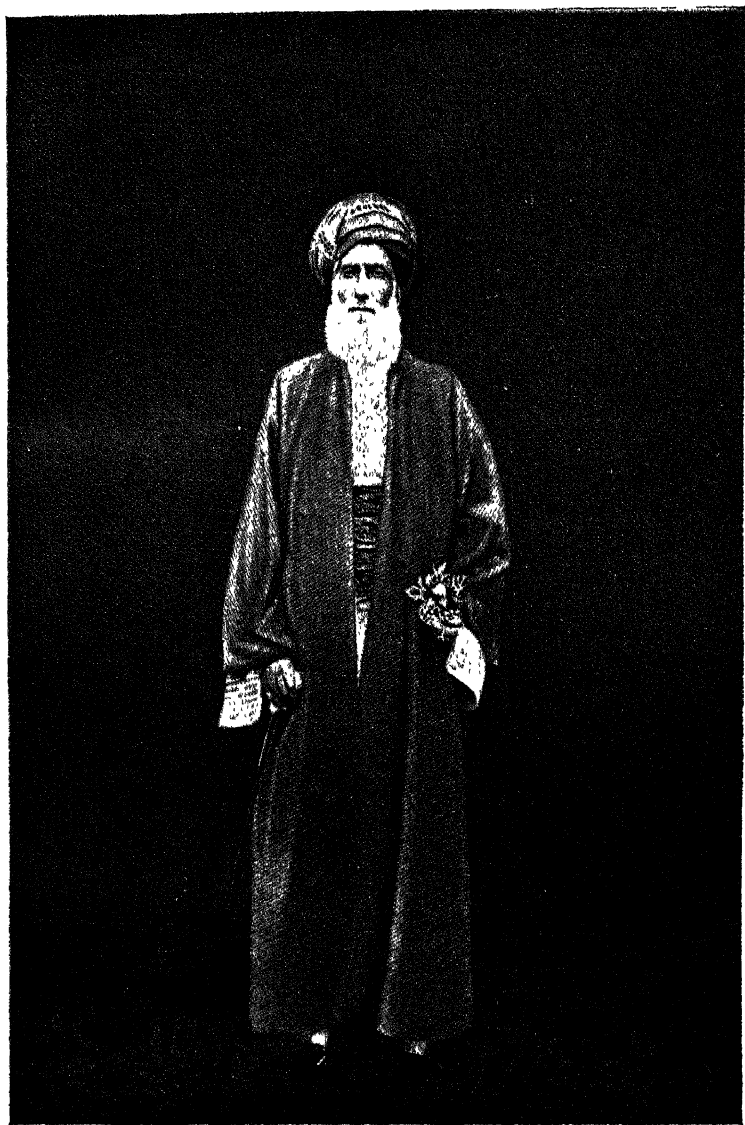
improvement in communications, internal and external. In 1850, the first sod of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway was turned, and three years later the first twenty miles from Bombay were opened to traffic: notwithstanding the gloomy prognostications of critics, who were convinced that no Indian of respectable standing would use such an undignified method of locomotion. In 1860, the first section of the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway was opened. In the previous year, the first-class fare by sea to England, via the Cape, was reduced to £85. And year after year there were being introduced from Europe the other new devices that were improving communications, helping manufacture, and facilitating trade. Sir Robert Grant, who had first championed Jewish Emancipation in the House of Commons, in what was said to have been one of the finest speeches ever made there, arrived in Bombay as Governor in 1835, though his tenure of office was made ineffective by his wife's ill-health: and one may imagine that the Iraqui immigrants knew sufficient of what was happening in the capital of the Empire to welcome his nomination.

These then were the circumstances that provided David Sassoon with the opportunities of which he availed himself with such incredible results. There was nothing (as was the case with the Rothschilds) of the spectacular background of the Napoleonic wars, none of the romance of hidden treasure quixotically protected for a reigning prince, none of the adroit transmission of bullion through enemy territory for the British armies in the field,

no news-service which could bring the government the earliest news of sweeping military victories such as Waterloo, no sensational *coups* on the Exchange. It was simply a story of common sense, probity, foresight and above all hard work.

The advance then was slow and gradual, and it was some time before David Sassoon became recognized as a man of mark among the business-men of Bombay. When some two years after his arrival, after prolonged perplexities and discussions, the Council put an end to a long-debated problem by issuing a Minute specifying what members of the native community should be addressed as "Esquire," David Sassoon was not included. By 1841, he was recognized to be the principal member of the local Arab-Jewish trading community, but even four years after this neither he nor any other Jew was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, in which half a century later his was to be the only name that had double representation. At the outset, of course, he lived above his counting-house at 9 Tamarind Lane (the era of luxurious villas was yet to come), and a former writer has drawn an attractive pen-picture of him at this period: "A quiet, unpretending man in Eastern dress, he comes out like Isaac at eventide, making his way by Church Gate . . . to witness the spectacle of the Queen's accession proclamation on the Esplanade."

The son of the Treasurer to the Pasha of Baghdad, he had not arrived penniless in India, but he started in business cautiously and on a relatively small scale: his two elder sons, Abdullah and Elias, assisting him from the beginning. At the outset he



DAVID SASSOON

1792 - 1864



did little more than continue the trading activities that he had previously carried on in Bushire, with a slight difference of perspective: whereas formerly he had imported to Persia from India, he now exported from India to Persia and the adjacent lands, including his native Mesopotamia. His business was at first largely in English textiles, in return for which he brought back native products and Oriental weaves, which he sold to the English traders in India for re-export to England. He enjoyed one great initial advantage over his competitors, especially the Europeans. He knew the countries with which he traded at first hand, was familiar with local conditions, spoke the various local languages, had correspondents whom he could trust (of course, Jews) in all the local centres. His business thus grew apace, and before long he was able to send his eldest son, Abdullah, back to Baghdad (now under the direct rule of the Sultans, and a faintly more comfortable place to live in than before) to supervise operations there. With astonishing rapidity, the scale of the firm's transactions increased until it became the largest in India engaged in the Gulf trade.

This remarkable development would have been impossible except for one imponderable asset that the house enjoyed from its earliest days. David Sassoon had left behind him, among those who had come into contact with him in Mesopotamia and Persia, an enviable reputation for unswerving personal probity and uprightness. This continued to be enjoyed by his family after him and by the firm which he founded. In the Occident, this might



perhaps have been considered a luxury. In the East, it was in itself a stock-in-trade. The Central Asian traffic in particular was entirely dependent on the personal integrity of those engaged in it. The merchants and caravan-owners were compelled in those days (as to a large extent even in these) to rely implicitly on one another's word and on verbal engagements. The great commercial houses constantly had out large sums, for which they had no legal security and no legal guarantee, for the debtors were beyond the reach of any civilized tribunal. All they had to rely on was the moral certainty that their correspondents would keep faith. In such circumstances as these, a reputation for punctilious honour in all dealings could not fail to be a factor of overwhelming importance. This David Sassoon, and his family after him, enjoyed in a remarkable degree. It was their most important business asset.

In consequence of this and of untiring application to affairs, the business rapidly expanded. Before many industrious years had passed, the most lucrative of the trade between Western India on the one hand, and Persia and Mesopotamia on the other, lay in his hands. Besides the original sea-borne traffic, communications were opened up overland via the passes of the Himalayas, with parts of Central Asia as yet unknown to European travellers and untouched by European traders: and here, too, the reputation of the firm of Sassoon before long established something that approached a monopoly.

It was thus that, before he had been established

at Bombay for many years, David Sassoon first entered into commercial relations overland with southern China. It was a turning-point in the history of his business, for it was this that gave him the clue of the boundless potentialities of his new place of residence. England knew it as the gateway that gave access to India from Europe. He himself could not have failed to consider it in its relation to Bushire, Basra, and the towns of the Persian Gulf. But the population to which access was gained by this route was comparatively small. What if one turned one's gaze further afield, to the untapped population, to the unnumbered millions of the Far East? Bombay was not only the gateway to India from Europe; it was the gateway from India to China. That was David Sassoon's great discovery, rewarded by a shower of gold.

Henceforth he interested himself more and more in the China trade, both in Bombay yarn and Lancashire piece-goods, as well as in opium, the pernicious effects of which had not at that time been generally realized. (In 1840, and again in 1855, Great Britain had not scrupled to go to war with China to maintain the right of free trade in the drug.<sup>1</sup>) Before long, the Chinese interests had increased to such an extent that some degree of personal supervision was necessary. For this purpose, Sassoon had another inestimable asset. His

<sup>1</sup> There has been a great deal of ill-natured comment on the participation of the Sassoons in the opium traffic in the days when it was considered unexceptionable. But it is less familiar that the suspension of the trade by the Government of India in 1913 (none too soon) was immediately occasioned by a memorial presented by the two Sassoon firms of those days.

first wife had died in 1826, and two years later, just before his flight from Baghdad, he had married Farha, daughter of Farraj Hyeem of that city, as his second wife. There were in all fourteen children of the two marriages—including eight sons, born between 1817 and 1841. Like Mayer Amschel Rothschild of Frankfort, David Sassoon found his offspring to be invaluable agents—honest, capable, and above all, thoroughly trustworthy.

As a result, in 1844, after he had been settled in Bombay for a little more than ten years, he had the idea of dispatching one of his sons to the Far East to supervise the operations of the firm. It was the second and (apparently) most enterprising of the house, Elias, whom he chose for the purpose. First the young man went to Canton, then the great emporium of Chinese trade. Subsequently he removed to Hong Kong, recently transferred to British sovereignty and rapidly growing in importance: then, about 1850, he opened up a branch in the treaty-port of Shanghai, which from now on became the second great centre of Sassoon activities and interests. Later on, other members of the family were sent to second his efforts there or in other parts of China. First came the eldest brother, Abdullah, who had formerly been in Baghdad (this was before the Far Eastern potentialities had been fully realized). Sassoon, the eldest son by David's second wife, was in Shanghai in the early eighteenth-fifties. Reuben, Abraham, Solomon, Farraj, all followed later on. Thus, in the end, all of the eight brothers (with perhaps one exception) served their apprenticeship there and had the experience of the

world that they afterwards turned to such good account. Thanks to their industry and devotion, the most lucrative part of the trade from British India to China and beyond (and, later on, much of the direct trade from England to the Far East) came into the hands of the firm of David Sassoon, Sons, & Company, as this subordinate house was styled, who had a practical monopoly of the importing of opium, fabrics, and cotton-yarn. Besides the branches in Shanghai, Canton and Hong Kong, there were agencies in Japan, at Yokohama, Nagasaki and other cities, generally managed by some member or connexion of the family. Another branch establishment set up rather earlier at Calcutta tapped the trade of Eastern India and constituted a half-way house to the Celestial Empire. It was the China trade that raised the house to the very first rank in British India. By 1854, David Sassoon was considered a millionaire; he was far more than this by the time of his death.

The branches of the business set up in the Far East were managed and, as far as possible, staffed by co-religionists of the founder's, specially imported for the purpose from Bombay or Baghdad. They were, of course, given every facility for Jewish observance, the firm establishing synagogues and providing religious functionaries to cater for their needs. It was thus under the auspices of the Sassoon family that congregations were set up in places such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, the humble subordinates sent out by them nearly a century ago being the pioneers of the community and the

ancestors of a good part of the prosperous men of affairs who control them to-day.

In 1858, when the Indian Mutiny had been suppressed without vitally affecting Bombay or Bombay trade (though a rising in the city had only just been averted through the vigour of the Chief of Police), a crucial step was taken. Sassoon David Sassoon, the patriarch's eldest son by his second wife, was brought home from China and sent to represent the firm in London. We will have a great deal more to say about him. It is enough to observe at this point that he seems to have inherited his full share of the family ability. Before he had been in England for more than three years, the interruption of the supplies of American cotton-yarn led to a feverish search for alternative sources of supply and caused an enormous expansion in the Bombay trade. By a lucky chance, the firm of David Sassoon & Company was present to take advantage of the unexpected opening, and they were one of the principal channels for the import of Indian yarn (at prices swollen by reason of the scarcity) to feed the starving Lancashire looms, and for the export of English commodities in vastly increased quantities in exchange. London now became a main centre of the firm's operations, and as a natural consequence branches were established also in Liverpool and Manchester. From this date onwards, the tendency of the business and of the family was more and more towards England.

David Sassoon had not been the only person to build up a great fortune in those great days of Bombay expansion. Two other magnates in

particular had come to the fore at the same time as this Jew, and had prospered fabulously. One was a Parsee, Rustamji Jejibhai, a member of that curious community that so resembles the Jewish in tenacity, in suffering, and in capacity for advance. The other was a Hindu, Premchand Roychand, a past-master in operations of banking and exchange, with many subordinate interests. Both of these were at the outset far more prominent and more affluent than their Jewish competitor. Both however succumbed before the temptations of the great Bombay boom of the eighteen-sixties, which was followed as usual by an equally great slump. The outbreak of the Civil War in America and the blockade of the southern ports brought about (as has been indicated above) an almost complete suspension of the import of cotton-yarn across the Atlantic for the Lancashire factories. At last, the Bombay yarn, notwithstanding certain inherent natural disadvantages from which it suffered, by reason of the smallness of the boll and its vulnerability to weather conditions, had its chance in the European market. (It had been exported to China, in small quantities, even in the eighteenth century, and had first begun to reach England in bulk in 1832, when the American costs had been artificially forced up.) The price rose enormously. Within the next five years, it was estimated, £81,000,000 more than would have been the case in normal times was transmitted from Europe to the Bombay shippers. Great fortunes were made almost overnight. As usual, the abundance of money brought on a financial boom: wild-cat companies were floated,

and others not quite so wild-cat. Bombay became (on the surface at least) prosperous as never before; and as usual it was imagined that the prosperity had come to stay. "The whole community of Bombay," it is stated by one authority, "from the highest English official to the lowest native broker, became utterly demoralized and, abandoning business, gave themselves up to the illusion that they could all succeed in making fortunes on the Stock Exchange." Though localized, it was probably the wildest outburst of share-mania that the world has known until our own day, when the same pleasing fallacy infected the population of the United States of America.

In 1865, after four years of prodigious prosperity, the Civil War in America came to an end with Lee's surrender at Appotomax, the blockade of the southern ports was lifted, the accumulated supplies of American cotton poured into the European market, and the price of the Indian yarn slumped catastrophically from twenty-four pence to sixpence a pound. In the middle of September, the two great cotton-exporting houses of Roychand and Jijibhai suspended payment, and a general panic ensued. The financial boom gave way to an unprecedented period of depression in 1866-1867. With it there passed into limbo not only the great fortunes that had been made while it lasted, but also some of those honestly and painfully amassed in the preceding years. A special Act had to be passed to relieve insolvents. Among the outstanding failures was the original Bank of Bombay,<sup>1</sup> which dragged

<sup>1</sup> The institution had been in existence since 1840; the new

a dozen other banks and many smaller concerns with it. When the shock had passed, it was found that among the great commercial houses of the city, that of David Sassoon & Company was one of the few that had ridden the storm. While both of his rivals had succumbed to the temptations of the boom period, the old man and his sons (particularly it is said Elias, now returned from China to be his right-hand man) had refused to become involved and had continued on the path of sound and legitimate business. Its position of pre-eminence among Bombay business-houses was confirmed, while the lesson which it learned at that time was never forgotten.

What manner of man was this David Sassoon? For one who achieved so much, what is known about him is singularly sparse. He had (it is clear) a particularly impressive appearance. Everything in the outward man heightened the dignity of his presence, a contemporary wrote. He was extremely tall, standing head and shoulders above the average inhabitant of Bombay. His Oriental garments and head-dress added to his dignity and to his apparent height; for he never abandoned the Baghdad costume of his youth. (To quote Sir Richard Temple, later Governor of Bombay, who knew him towards the end of his life and admired him greatly: "He was then advanced in years, and his grave countenance, commanding figure, rich turban and flowing robes made up a picture worth beholding.")

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Bank of Bombay (of which it was said that its greatest guarantee was the example of the blunders made by its predecessor) was founded in 1868.



His range of intellectual attainment was remarkable. To the Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish of his youth he soon added Hindustani, the language of his new environment, or at least the colloquial form known as "Bombay Bat": but this multi-millionaire who rose to fame and fortune under the British flag never mastered English. (Even when the Governor-General himself inaugurated one of the Sassoon benefactions with a laudatory speech in that tongue, the patriarch replied, an impressive figure, in his native Arabic!) But, above all, he seems to have been a man of astounding virile force. He transmitted his outstanding ability to almost each one of his enormous brood of children, by both his marriages. Moreover, his physical type too perpetuated itself; and among his great-great-grandchildren, born in a far-off land and with an unblemished European ancestry in most lines for many generations, it is even to-day possible to see sometimes (even when the parents would perhaps prefer to dispense with it) the physical heredity of David Sassoon of Bombay.

Even after his rise to fame and fortune, he remained profoundly attached to the tradition of stern and uncompromising Judaism to which he had been brought up.<sup>1</sup> He was a man of intimate piety, meticulously observant of all the minutiae of Jewish law and practice,<sup>1</sup> a devoted student of the Talmud; and he saw to it that his sons, who were subsequently to be so prominent in such

<sup>1</sup> When in 1843 he manumitted a belated slave (slavery was not yet forbidden in India) a formal Hebrew document was drawn up in accordance with the Rabbinic stipulations of a thousand years before.

widely removed spheres of life, all had a thorough Jewish education in the traditional style. ("All of them are pious and learned," wrote an ecstatic visitor from Palestine in 1854.) He was, too, a competent Hebrew scholar, and wrote an elegant if involved preface in that tongue to a work by a remote kinsman published at Leghorn in 1862, presumably at his expense. At the beginning, all the firm's accounts, and the correspondence between the far-flung branches, were in Judæo-Arabic—Arabic, that is, with an admixture of Hebrew and written in Hebrew characters, like the Judæo-German of Eastern Europe, the Judæo-Spanish of the Levant, and the Judæo-Italian or Judæo-Provençal of the Middle Ages. That language long remained usual in the family for domestic purposes even after the founder's day, and so long as he lived its supremacy was unchallenged. When in 1853, David Sassoon was naturalized, after residing and carrying on trade in Bombay for some twenty years, he endorsed the certificate in Judæo-Arabic, and signed the oath of allegiance in Hebrew!

That he was a regular synagogue attendant goes without saying. But this does not imply that he put in a perfunctory appearance on Sabbaths. He attended public worship also on Mondays and Thursdays, when tradition prescribed the reading of a lesson of the Pentateuch; while on other days he assembled a quorum for prayer in the oratory which he maintained in his house, or else drove out to the villas of his sons, which were equipped in a similar pious fashion. Even in business, the

Jewish tradition was not neglected, and bills drawn upon the Bombay house long after the day of the founder contained the name of the firm in Hebrew—*David Sassoon veHaberav*. All the offices and branches and workshops were closed on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as well as on Sunday, the conventional day of rest observed by the other great merchants of the city; for the Sassoons agreed with a more humble Hebrew philosopher, that if a man could not make a fortune in five days it was highly improbable that he would be able to do so in six. In the counting-house, work was regularly suspended during the afternoon, while the *Mincha* service was piously recited with the prescribed quorum. Every Saturday, the heads of the Bombay Jewish community assembled in David Sassoon's house, accompanied by such native and foreign scholars as were available. The afternoon would be occupied with study of the *Zohar* and Talmud, or listening to a learned discourse from some long-bearded visiting Rabbi, punctuated by the chanting of the traditional hymns. At sundown, the evening service would be mellifluously recited; after which the pious householder permitted fire to be used once more after the Sabbatical rest, and the company was regaled on coffee and narghiles. All this, in the house of a man whose lightest word carried weight from Yokohama to London, and who was treated with deference even by the Governor-General himself.

It goes without saying that the patriarch was looked up to as the head of the Jewish community of Bombay. Indeed, its history is in its way little

other than an extension of the history of the Sassoon family. When the founder of the house first settled there, local life was from the Hebraic point of view an extraordinary medley. At least four entirely different elements were represented among the Jewish population. There was in the first place a dwindling European element, partly of English origin, which had been settled since the days of the Portuguese occupation. (The most eminent name in their history was that of the great Garcia d'Orta, founder of the sciences of tropical medicine and tropical botany and by far the most important figure in the intellectual life of Portuguese Bombay, who escaped burning at the hands of the Inquisition only by an admirably timed natural death.) By now, however, they had ceased to maintain any sort of corporate life among themselves, and begun to lose their religious identity. Most nearly akin to them were the handful of Baghdad Jews who had blazed out the trail for the Sassoons. "More noble-looking men than they," said a Scottish contemporary, "are not to be seen on the streets of Bombay." They did not comprise, in 1832, more than twenty or thirty families all told, who assembled for worship in a small house hired from a Parsee and approximately adapted for Synagogue use. At their head was a certain Solomon Jacob, the first Arab Jew to reach Bombay in the nineteenth century, described as a man of questionable character.<sup>1</sup> Then there were

<sup>1</sup> The origins of the community date back a hundred years earlier, to about the year 1730, when a Baghdad Jew named Joseph Semah settled in Surat: he removed thence to Bombay shortly after.

the native, quasi-aboriginal Jews from Cochin and the Malabar Coast, divided into "Black" and "White" Jews. They had been settled in India for a thousand years or more and followed a completely Indian way of life, but preserved in their entirety notwithstanding their centuries-long isolation the religious traditions which united them with the general body of Jewry. Finally, there were the so-called "Bene Israel," who had formerly lived scattered round the Presidency but had now begun to concentrate in Bombay itself: completely Indian too, both anthropologically and socially, who had inherited monotheistic notions from hypothetical Jewish ancestors of many centuries before and within the last generation or so had embraced traditional Judaism in its strictest sense with all the eagerness of neophytes. They were, incidentally, a community with a great military tradition, many of them rising under John Company and after to the highest ranks open to native soldiers and earning the most coveted distinctions. This curious, and unique, gradation of the various elements in the Jewish community could have here in India only one result, and there was something almost of the caste-system rather than mere social snobbery in the aloof manner in which one section eyed the other. Yet this took place in a total body of very small dimensions. In 1833, at the time of David Sassoon's arrival, there were in Bombay only 2,246 Jews out of a total population of nearly a quarter of a million. (To-day, they number some 8,500 out of a total of nearly 1,250,000, the number of Jews in the whole of India being about 25,000.)

David Sassoon belonged by birth, tastes and antecedents to the second of the elements that have been described above, the Arab Baghdadi Jewish community. Its general condition was hardly likely to appeal to a man of his intense piety and learning. For some years after his arrival, he had to make shift nevertheless with the unsatisfactory organization that he had found, supplemented by his domestic and family resources. In 1855, at last, the occasional assemblies in his house became crystallized into a religious confraternity bearing his name, *Hebrath Beth David* ("The Brotherhood of the House of David") into the organization of which his elder sons threw themselves with filial enthusiasm. This constituted the nucleus around which a new model organization of Baghdadi Jews was now formed, equipped with all the requirements of the traditional Jewish congregation, and increasing with notable rapidity as the result of constant immigration from Mesopotamia. In 1861, David Sassoon built it a beautiful synagogue in the then fashionable Byculla quarter, set in a spacious compound and equipped with a clock-tower—very different from the undignified conventicle that had to serve before his coming. By the side of this, he erected a hospice for travellers, a ritual bath, and a *Talmud Torah*, or institution for the education of Jewish youth in the traditional lore.

Henceforth, the personality and the firm of David Sassoon were the axis around which all that was most noteworthy in Bombay-Jewish life revolved. An absurdly high proportion of the Hebrew community of the city were dependent on the firm

## *The Sassoon Dynasty*

for a livelihood: for most of the employees in his counting-house and stores were his co-religionists. The association began at a very early age, charity and business being inextricably interwoven. Poor Jews came over from Baghdad in an unceasing stream in the hope of finding employment with their fellow-townsmen; and they were seldom disappointed. Their children were entered at an early age at the school which he had established—the David Sassoon Benevolent Institution—at which there were taught (in addition to the indispensable English and Hindustani) Arabic, Geography, Arithmetic, Book-keeping, and of course Hebrew: the famous Jewish scholar of Berlin, Moritz Steinschneider, being commissioned by the founder to compile special text books for this purpose, enriched with a translation of “God Save the King” in the tongue, though not the style, of the Psalmist. Thus the pupils were fully equipped for office work: and they passed automatically from the Sassoon school to the Sassoon counting-house or else were sent to China to one of the branch establishments. Another subject was taught, which does not generally figure on the scholastic curriculum—*Shechita*, or the traditional Jewish method of killing animals for food. Thus equipped, it was possible for pious ex-pupils to travel in remote provinces or to settle without inconvenience as agents of the firm in far-off places where no Jewish community had yet been formed. The modern progress of the Hebrew congregations in one place after the other, all over India and the Far East, can be traced only as part of the business and public

activities of the firm of David Sassoon & Company and its offshoots.

It was not only a question sometimes of forming new communities, but also of preserving old ones, in circumstances that were sometimes dramatic. This was especially so in China, where Elias Sassoon heard on his arrival in 1844 some vague talk of a community of aboriginal Jewish co-religionists. They had been settled from time immemorial (at least since the tenth century) in one or two great centres, particularly Kai-Fung-Foo, and had become completely identified with the surrounding population. In physical type they were indistinguishable from their neighbours. They wore Chinese costume (probably cut rather too well for good breeding), spoke and wrote the local dialect with distinction, prided themselves on their elegant pigtails, enriched the life of the province with mandarins of acknowledged probity and sapience, and revered the spirits of their ancestors in a highly unmosaic fashion. But they were Jews none the less, and had a magnificent synagogue rebuilt by the Hebrew mandarin, Chao Yng-Cheng, in 1652, after the destruction of the old one in a siege. Here they carried on the ancient Hebrew rites and preserved with admirable persistence the relics of the ancient Hebrew literature. When this pathetic island of Hebraism set in a vast Confucian ocean was first discovered by Europeans, in the seventeenth century, it seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to convert them to Christianity. They withstood all blandishments for some two hundred years, until they came into the purview of the Protestant



missionaries, who hit upon a brilliant new technique. Christianity was represented to them, not as a separate religion, but as a reformed type of Judaism, which Jews throughout the world had accepted with avidity. This shabby trick met with a great deal of success, until about 1858 it was brought to the notice of the representatives of the Sassoon family in Shanghai, who intervened and stopped the impious fraud. Thereafter they took a fatherly interest in the little orphan Jewish colony and participated in the periodical movements made from time to time to revive it. But it had by now progressed too far on the path of decay: and the only relics now are a few families vaguely conscious of their Jewish descent grouped about the ruins of their synagogue (now in the hands of the Scottish Mission), and one or two clerks, Chinese in appearance but Jews by faith, employed in the Sassoon establishments in Shanghai.

As a result of constant activity of this type, David Sassoon's piety and kindness of heart soon became known among his co-religionists far and wide, in places where European Jews were as yet quite unknown. At el-Kifil, near Hillah, in Mesopotamia, he had the traditional shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel restored at his sole expense, and sent an embroidered catafalque to cover the actual sepulchre, venerated far and wide throughout hither Asia by men of every faith. From every part of the Orient men appealed to him in any case of emergency or when any meritorious deed was to be performed—when a prisoner was to be freed, or a synagogue to be built, or a bride to be dowered, or a book to be

printed. Supplicants came to him from Basra and Baghdad, from Persia and Bokhara, from Syria and the Yemen, from Damascus and Aleppo, not to mention a perpetual stream of learned, eloquent emissaries from the "Four Holy Cities" of Palestine. And they seldom came in vain. In India, his primacy was so unquestionable that other rich men generously allowed him to take almost the entire financial burden of the synagogue and its offshoots on his shoulders (in fact, a very serious disadvantage to the Bombay Jewish community, deprived of initiative and cohesion by the liberality of successive generations of its leading family). It was impossible in the long run for the civil authorities to remain ignorant of the place that the old man enjoyed in the Jewish community. Ultimately it became usual that, when any case between Jews was brought before the magistrates, they told the litigants to submit it to David Sassoon for adjudication.

With one member of the European community, at least, he was on the most intimate terms. This was John Wilson, the famous scholar, missionary and archæologist, whom a Parsee contemporary described as "the best man that ever was in Bombay." He knew David Sassoon almost from the moment of his arrival, and they became close friends. Often, they spent their evenings together studying the Old Testament in the original, through the medium of Hindustani eked out by snatches of Arabic, and the Scotsman became in the end sufficient of a Hebrew scholar to be able to teach that language in the University. In 1841, he persuaded Sassoon, as "the most opulent merchant

of their body," to call a meeting at his house of the principal Arabian Jews and others interested (the latter included some eminent members of the British colony) in order to discuss a mission of inquiry into the condition of their co-religionists in the Yemen and other regions untouched by civilization. Later, the conversation turned upon the Messiahship of Jesus, the children being sent out of the room so as to allow their elders greater freedom in discussion. When, after David Sassoon's death, the fortieth anniversary of Wilson's arrival in Bombay was publicly celebrated, his eldest son, Abdullah, took a foremost share in the function, in commemoration of the long intimacy between the two men in his father's day.

David Sassoon's charitable benefactions were on a vast scale. "In public life," it was said at the time of his death, "he was ever fervent to engage in any enterprise that promised to promote the welfare of his fellow-men." He piously observed the old Jewish practice of devoting at least one-tenth of his income to charitable purposes, and indeed ascribed his success in life largely to his faithful observance of this precept. But it is probable that this proportion was covered by his private benefactions to his co-religionists, his public endowments and those to the general community being supernumerary. His distributions to the poor Jews of Bombay, Basra, Baghdad and the Holy Land alone were said to amount to some 30,000 rupees yearly; but his charity extended beyond this, to every country with which he had business, personal or sentimental ties—Turkey, China, Japan, Persia, even

England. But the general world knew of his munificence only by his public benefactions, which no Indian citizen before him, with only one or two exceptions, had previously equalled. Though uncompromisingly Oriental in appearance, costume, language, and manner of life, he studied and tried to introduce into India the new instruments of Occidental scientific charity. Thus, for example, he created at Bombay the first Indian reformatory—the Sassoon Reformatory and Industrial Institution for Juvenile Offenders—and shortly before his death set aside a large sum of money for its first general cultural centre—the Sassoon Mechanics' Institute, with its reading-room and library and (as was first planned) its educational museum.

The list of his benefactions is no less impressive than it is monotonous, for he left his imprint in every aspect of Indian charitable endeavour. He subscribed liberally to the Famine Fund, to the fund for the widows and orphans of those who fell during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, to the Lancashire Relief Fund at the time of the American Civil War (not unfittingly, for it had brought much grist to his mill), to the Sailors' Homes at Hong Kong and Bombay, which provided shelter for those who carried his merchandise across the seas. At Poona, where he in common with the other Bombay magnates had his summer residence, he built (besides the inevitable synagogue and school) an Infirm Asylum and a great General Hospital on the European model, for all castes and creeds, at a cost of more than 300,000 rupees. This, inaugurated in 1863 by Sir Bartle Frere and completed in

1857, continued to be the darling institution of his family, together with the Sassoon Infirmary and the Leper Asylum set up near it. It was estimated that by the time of his death his public benefactions totalled 700,000 rupees: his private benefactions were said to have exceeded these in amount. Like many other philanthropists, he liked to see the outcome of his generosity, when it was feasible, in tangible and visible form. Thus, he gave the Victoria and Albert Museum at Bombay an illuminated clock-tower at a cost of £15,000, being rewarded by his grateful fellow-citizens, in defiance of the second Commandment, by placing his bust in the interior; and his last public action was to present the same institution with a marble statue of the recently-deceased Prince Consort, which cost him £3,600. But there was with this open-handed stalwart no question of hiding his Jewish light under an interdenominational bushel; he saw to it that the monument embodied a Hebrew inscription!<sup>1</sup>

For a poor Iraqui Jew, to be a co-religionist of David Sassoon was in the middle of the nineteenth century a well-defined career. At Baghdad, his family would doubtless be dependent in no small measure on the largesse sent by the patriarch for distribution among the poor of his native city, which took place at the door of one of the places of worship which he supported. Ultimately (perhaps with a subvention from the same source) they

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew is rather more commonplace than the English, which runs: "Dear to science, dear to art, dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed."

might go and settle in Bombay. Here, their offspring would receive its early education in the Sassoon Talmud Torah, thence passing on to the Sassoon Benevolent Institution. When he had arrived at approximate maturity, he would be taken as an employee into the firm of David Sassoon & Company. Among its other manifold advantages was the fact that it was closed on Saturday, affording the young employee the opportunity to attend worship at the *Magen David* synagogue at Byculla, named after and constructed by the patriarch, thereafter going to improve his mind in the library of the Sassoon Mechanics' Institute. Day and night he was able to regulate his life by the illuminated clock of the Victoria and Albert Museum that David had presented, and on his free days he could go there and be inspired to greater efforts by the Statue of the Prince Consort which symbolized the great man's loyalty. When he was ill, he might be nursed back to health at the Sassoon hospital at Poona, and if any of his children turned out badly they could be taken in hand by the Sassoon Reformatory. Throughout his life, he was able to benefit at time of stress from charities founded or supported by the family: and on his death (if he survived long enough) he was buried at the Chinchpogli cemetery, purchased by one of David Sassoon's sons.

All this had been the achievement of some thirty years. David Sassoon was a middle-aged man, some forty years old, when he came to India, and he did not survive more than a year or so beyond the allotted span. In 1864, while staying at his summer

residence at Poona, he had a sudden attack of fever to which he succumbed on November 7th; he had just completed his seventy-second year. He was buried in a mausoleum in the courtyard of the Synagogue he had established in the city where he had breathed his last. Long and laudatory Hebrew inscriptions, in prose and verse, were engraved upon it. But *The Times of India* provided the epitaph for the outside world: "Bombay has lost one of its most energetic, wealthy, public-spirited and benevolent citizens. . . . In personal appearance, private character and public life most remarkable."

His memory was honoured in a manner for which there were at that time few precedents. A little more than a month after his death, a special meeting was held at the Bombay Town Hall, under the chairmanship of the Governor himself, to consider how this eminent citizen of Bombay could best be commemorated. It was decided to place a statue at the public expense in the Mechanics' Institute that he had founded. Thomas Woolner, R.A., was entrusted with the task, which he carried out ably, though he somewhat over-idealized his subject. But it was not easy to convey in stone or metal the qualities that had constituted the real David Sassoon, or the prodigious *élan vital* that he was able to transmit, with his physical characteristics, to his family after him, to the third and fourth generation. English poets, politicians, society hosts, patrons of the arts—what did they not owe to this remarkable forebear of theirs?

## THE SASSOONS BY GENERATIONS

First Generation.	DAVID SASSOON (Chapters i—ii)							
Second Generation.	Sir Albert (Chaps. iii., v., vi.)	Elias (Chap. iv.)	Sassoon (Chaps. v., viii.)	Reuben (Chaps. v., vi.)	Arthur (Chaps. v., vi.)	Aaron (Chap. v.)	Solomon (Chap. iii.), Flora (Chaps. iii., v.)	Frederick (Chap. v.)
Third Generation.	Sir Edward (Chap. vii.)	Jacob. Sir Edward (i) Meyer (ii) (Chaps. iv., vii.)	Rachel (Mrs. Beer), Joseph, Alfred (i) (Chap. viii.)	David (Chap. vii.)			David (Chap. v.)	
Fourth Generation.	Sir Philip (Chap. x.)	(i) Sir Victor, (ii) Reginald (Chap. ix.)	(i) Siegfried (Chap. ix.)					

*The key-figures before names of the fourth generation should be connected with those after names in the third and indicate parentage.*



## CHAPTER III

### THE SECOND GENERATION

As has been mentioned above, David Sassoon ascribed his amazing success in large measure to the assistance of his retinue of devoted and able sons, who had played a great part in the family business even before his death. It is inevitable to think in this respect too of the parallel with the Rothschilds, but here again there were striking differences between the two clans. The Frankfort family, brought above the average by the founder of the house, rose to its highest pinnacle of fame under his five immensely capable sons, among whom the third of the family, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, who settled in London, was pre-eminent. Among the Sassoons on the other hand the founder of the house was indubitably the outstanding character, and his sons did no more than carry on his tradition in business. The Rothschild brothers, moreover, carved up the world among themselves, each establishing himself in a different financial centre and setting up his own firm, closely connected with those established by his brothers yet independent of them. The firm founded by David Sassoon, on the other hand, remained one and indivisible: and his sons, though they established branches throughout the world, moved from one centre to

the other without becoming identified definitely with any locality until at last they gravitated in almost every case to London.

One other point of difference is worth noting. The Five Frankforters were brothers. The Eight Asiatics, on the other hand (four of them born in Iraq, four in Bombay), were only half-brothers; and the persistence among them of ability of really high order is itself a testimony to the extraordinary vitality of the physical and mental heritage of David Sassoon. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that there was a difference in age of thirty-five years between the eldest son and the youngest; thus the second and in some cases even the third generation of the senior branches of the family were contemporary with their uncles or great-uncles. Chronology is still further confused by the fact that the deaths of the eight brothers were spread over an entire half-century: with results (to be sure) far less preposterous than in the case of the two aunts of Charles James Fox, one of whom died a century and a half before the other!

David Sassoon's first wife, Hannah (Anna) Joseph, whom he married in 1808, in his seventeenth year, had died in 1826. She left behind her four children—two sons, Abdullah (born in 1817), and Elias (born in 1820), and two daughters, Mazal-Tob and Amam. Two years later, the patriarch-to-be married for a second time, Farha, daughter of Farraj Hyeem, of Baghdad. She was only eleven years old at the time of the marriage, having been born in 1812. But the Occidental reader must restrain his indignation, and revise his

opinion of the family life of the East. She was twenty before her eldest son was born: and she survived, amid the adoration of her family, to the ripe old age of seventy-five! She presented David with six sons and three daughters (it was a relatively rare instance of over-indulgence in progeny on the part of someone who could afford it). The eldest (born in 1832), the first addition to the family after the old Nasi's death, was named Sassoon after his grandfather; then came Reuben (born 1835), Abraham Shalom or Arthur (born 1840), the twins Aaron and Solomon (born 1841) and Farraj Hayim or Frederick, named after his maternal grandfather (born 1853). The daughters were Kate (born 1844), Rebecca (born 1847) and Mazal-Tob or Mozelle (born 1855)—the youngest of the entire family. It must be mentioned at this stage that, true to Oriental and occasional Occidental practice, each of the sons appended his father's first name to his own, this remaining usual at the outset in succeeding generations. Thus the second son was known as Elias David Sassoon, the third as Sassoon David Sassoon, and so on. It is necessary to be quite clear on this point; some standard works of reference have been badly confused, and misled later investigators, as the result of this simple reiteration of name.

On David Sassoon's death, the leadership in the family and in the firm was assumed, as a matter of course, by his eldest son. This was Abdullah (named after his maternal grandfather, Abdullah Joseph) in honour of whom his father was colloquially known in his Arabic-speaking circle as

'Abu-Abdullah,' or 'Abdullah's father.' But the name was an exotic one, hardly suited for a man who was to cut a great figure in European circles: and Abdullah Sassoon subsequently adopted, first as an addition and then as an all-but-invariable substitute (though without any legal formality) the English approximation 'Albert'—a name certainly unknown in the Jewish quarter of Baghdad when he was born there in 1817. (The choice was of course pre-eminently loyal: the late Prince Consort was Albert and the Prince of Wales Albert Edward). In 1838, at what his Baghdadi forebears would have considered the indecently mature age of twenty-one, he married Hannah, daughter of Meir Moise, another member of the Iraqi Jewish colony of Bombay. (It is legitimate to see in the surname a tardy Gallicization of something more familiar to the English ear and more distinctly Hebraic<sup>1</sup>). At the time of his father's death, he had two sons and three daughters—something of a diminution on the superb prolificness of the previous generation. He seems to have inherited a particularly high proportion of his father's qualities and ability, and he if any of the second generation of the family

<sup>1</sup> The name "Moses" has been ennobled, while this work was passing through the Press, by the death in action of Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Beddington, whose original family name it was (though, of course, he had no connection with his Oriental homonyms). A Jew, proud both of his Jewish origin and of his English citizenship, he was wounded while fighting in the British forces in the Boer War and again in the war of 1914-1918, when he commanded a battalion. He was killed in August 1940, while in command of his own yacht, which had been loaned to the Admiralty as an auxiliary vessel and was machine-gunned by a German aeroplane: he was then in his seventy-third year.

may be considered the Nathan Mayer Rothschild of his house.

After spending a good many years abroad in the firm's interest, first in Baghdad and then in China, Albert-Abdullah returned to Bombay where he assisted his father in his last years to manage the still-growing business. Thus, when he was left in control in 1864, he had a vast amount of practical experience not only of the central mechanism but also of the special circumstances of the various branches and the requirements of overseas markets. He inherited his father's commercial ability and reputation for personal integrity, as well as his benevolent tastes (he had been associated with him in the great endowments of his later years). At the same time, he lacked little of the audacious spirit and of the stern, uncompromising traditionalism that had combined to make the figure of David Sassoon so commanding and so exceptional. He showed an extremely quick perception for new currents, new openings and new opportunities. These became especially numerous after the opening of the Suez Canal at the end of 1869, shortly after Albert-Abdullah became the head of the firm, which cut weeks off the length of the journey to Europe and entirely altered the economic life of Western India. He was not therefore simply content to follow in his father's tracks, but branched out in new directions when the opportunity offered, so long as there was no question of speculation or risk.

A good part of the work of the firm was to a large extent mechanical by now. Nevertheless,

carrying on his father's tradition with skill and devotion, and taking advantage of the increasing security and the constant improvement in communications, the new head was able to extend even further the relations of the firm with China on the one hand and with Persia on the other. During the thirty years that he was at the head of the firm, these activities attained their greatest development, and the name of the House of Sassoon reached the acme of its reputation.

Above all there was under Albert-Abdullah Sassoon one extension which was to prove vitally important in the history, not of the firm only, but of India. David Sassoon had laid the foundation of his prosperity in part on the importing of Lancashire piece-goods and other textiles, which were distributed from Bombay throughout India and ultimately to Central Asia and the Far East as well. But was it necessary to import these commodities? The raw material was native to India—it was not to England; and labour was cheaper and more plentiful locally than in any part of the Western hemisphere. All that was lacking then was the machinery: and this could easily be obtained. It came of course from England: and the immediate advantage to the steel industry made men forget the ultimate blow to Lancashire. The initiative did not come from the Sassoons (the first mill established was that of the Bombay Spinning and Weaving Company, opened in 1854): but they were quick to realize the enormous opportunities it offered, and gave the process a great impetus. Before long, a vast manufactory of cotton goods sprang up under

their auspices and that of their associates, and for some time their supremacy was unchallenged. This was indubitably the most important development in the history of Indian industry in the nineteenth century: though it must be added that it was inevitable in the long run, whether the Sassoons had participated in it or no. Moreover, much the same methods were employed in the weaving of silk, in which there was an ancient, primitive local tradition, barely challenged by the modern looms of Lyons and Milan, by which English interests were quite unaffected. Thus, by the side of the original firm, David Sassoon and Company, there grew up subordinate manufacturing and weaving establishments which played their part in revolutionizing the weaving industry in the dependency, and in transforming Bombay, in the second half of the century, into a smoke-blurred manufacturing city.<sup>1</sup> Albert-Abdullah thus earned his niche as one of the creators of Industrial India.

Another extension of the firm's activities at this period was in the direction of what would in a later generation have been termed rationalized agriculture, on a vast scale. At the time of the speculation craze of the eighteen-sixties in India, a German financier named Ferdinand Schiller had the brilliant idea of creating on reclaimed land at the mouth of the River Mutlah a new city that was to take the place of Calcutta, with a port which should divert trade from the Hooghly. The proposal, unlike so many others advanced at the period, was perfectly

<sup>1</sup> Another branch of the family was however more prominent in this process: see pages 100-102.

sound and honest. It suffered only from one major disadvantage—that, however ingenious, it was completely pointless. This was of course sufficient to secure it ample Government encouragement, as well as financial support from the public. A number of illustrious names were assembled to garnish the prospectus, the company was formally launched at Bombay, and before long the shares had appreciated by several hundred per cent. A short line of railway was constructed, swamp-land was successfully drained, and the reclaimed site that was designated for the new city was christened, in compliment to the Governor-General, Port Canning. With the slump of 1865, the scheme collapsed, and little remained but the rusty rails, the name, and the piece of ground to which it was attached. If unsuited for a great city, it was admirable for husbandry; and to work it the Sassoons created a vast agricultural enterprise with estates which eventually covered a very wide area, known as the Port Canning and Land Improvement Company. Never before perhaps in the history of agriculture had work of this sort been undertaken so systematically and on so vast a scale. Before long no less than 15,000 ryots (a fantastically high number) were employed there in developing the resources of that incredibly fertile soil, from which a good part of the population of Western India (including many of the employees of the Sassoon Mills) ultimately received their food. The old economic conflict between the city and the countryside—between the interests that is of those who wanted the price of food to be low, and those of others who



wanted it high—was thus resolved by a process of combination.

Thus, during the period of the control of Albert-Abdullah Sassoon and his brothers, the interests of David Sassoon and Company extended. By common consent, the finest specimen of street architecture in Bombay was the Sassoon's Buildings near Elphinstone Circle, designed by Rienzi Walton, and subsequently occupied by the Italian Consulate. Before the end of the century, the firm controlled also the Sassoon Spinning and Weaving Company, the Sassoon and Alliance Silk Manufacturing Company, and the Port Canning and Land Improvement Company, as well as having a considerable interest in the Oriental Life Assurance Company (one of the most prosperous concerns of the sort in India) and the elegantly-named Prince of Wales Fire Insurance Company. Moreover, as the leading firm of merchants trading with Persia, the Sassoons were naturally invited to collaborate when Sir Henry Drummond Wolff (the gifted offspring of a match between an apostate Jewish missionary and a member of the British aristocracy)<sup>1</sup> organized

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Wolff was an extraordinary character. His missionary journeys to the Orient were so venturesome (at least in his published account) that, when the British agents, Stoddart and Conolly, disappeared from view in Bokhara, he was sent by public subscription to trace them. The story goes that, when he applied for the hand of Lady Georgiana Walpole, Lord Orford asked for details as to his family. "I am of the illustrious blood of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," replied the little missionary, pompously. "Oh! Our family can boast of nothing compared with that," replied the Earl, nonplussed. But he remembered the episode. "Fine Christian, indeed," he used to say. "Why, the fellow has phylacteries sewn into the ends of his trousers."

the banking concession granted by the Shah in 1872 to Baron Reuter, whose association with news has somewhat obscured his absorption in finance.

The outcome was the establishment twenty years later of the Imperial Bank of Persia (known after 1935 as the Imperial Bank of Iran). In this, the Sassoons had an important share, together with the firms of Glyn Mills and Henry Schroeder and Co., and a member of the family long figured on the Board of Directors. This, it must be added, was almost their only excursion into the world of finance in the strict sense. The House of Sassoon were merchants, with industrial interests. They were not, like the Rothschilds, bankers and financiers, notwithstanding the general misapprehension on this point, nor did they have important financial interests. They imported and exported on an enormous scale and over a vast range of territory: they chartered steamers plying on all the seven seas, though with a natural predilection for one of them: they were of course active in the Indian exchange market in all its branches. But they were intimately associated with no great financial enterprises or institutions, with the exception of the one just mentioned—and that for special reasons.

The constant extension in the firm's activities and growth of the amount of merchandise that it handled made Albert-Abdullah Sassoon actively

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Henry Drummond Wolff, who united his blood with that of the Walpoles, shone equally in diplomacy, business and politics (he was one of the "Fourth Party" with A. J. Balfour, Sir John Gorst and Randolph Churchill), and his daughter was Lucas Cleeve, the novelist.

conscious of one serious deficiency in the equipment of Bombay as a commercial centre—the absence of adequate docking facilities, notwithstanding its superb site and great natural advantages. This became all the more marked when the completion of the Suez Canal brought to the Indian harbours steamers of the highest tonnage then afloat, and virtually drove sailing-vessels off the Indian Ocean. With this problem, the house of Sassoon coped almost single-handed, in the teeth of almost universal opposition and even derision from business competitors, from the City authorities, and even from the Government. A piece of land was purchased at Colaba from the Back Bay Company at an extremely high price, and here, notwithstanding the rocky foreshore and the difficulty of approach (that it was peculiarly malodorous was unimportant), there was successfully constructed the first wet dock on the western coast of India, which is still known as the Sassoon Dock. It was a stupendous work. It took three years to complete, from 1872 to 1875: and it covered an area of little less than 200,000 square feet. Though it was not, and did not purport to be, altruistic in intention, it was in fact the greatest and most important of Albert-Abdullah's Sassoon's benefactions to his beloved Bombay. It was triumphantly successful. It stimulated the commercial relations of the Port to a notable degree: and before long the Government testified publicly to its recognition of the fact by purchasing it and placing it under the Bombay Port Trust. Through the success of this enterprise moreover the authorities were encouraged

to begin the construction of the great Prince's Dock (named after the Prince of Wales, who laid the foundation-stone in November 1875). The creation of the modern port of Bombay is thus due in large measure to Albert-Abdullah's initiative.

Yet the importance of the Sassoons and of their various enterprises must not be exaggerated. For there is in Bombay an element, far more numerous and more important than the Jews, who have all of what are regarded as the traditional Jewish characteristics, who perform much the same economic function, whose worldly success is generally speaking far greater, and who produced some families of merchant princes whose achievement puts that even of the Sassoons in the shade. Parsee and Jewish history is curiously similar, with one principal difference: that the Jewish Diaspora, on the conquest of Palestine by the Romans, extended in the main west, whereas the Zoroastrians of Persia, from whom the Parsees originated, made their way, on the conquest of their country by the Arabs in the eighth century, east. Thereafter, they suffered from a similar long series of persecutions, so that to-day their number is only some 100,000, but, like the Jews, they were able to keep their religious faith uncontaminated. They developed, too, the same social ideals and qualities of a persecuted people. To use the words of one writer<sup>1</sup>: "the Parsee has contrived, without the sacrifice of principle, to maintain himself in the midst of an alien population, and though never of the world surrounding him,

<sup>1</sup> E. E. Kellett, *A Short History of Religions*.

dwells in it." "Their religion teaches them benevolence as the first principle, and they practise it with liberality. The sagacity, activity and commercial enterprise of the Parsees are proverbial," concludes the article on the subject in a standard work of reference, in terms that could be used without the slightest alteration of similar minority sects, not only the Jews, for example, but also the Quakers.

The circumstances of their history—persecution, urbanization, solidarity—drove the Parsees, like the Jews, into business life: and in Bombay, where their settlement dates from 1640, they occupy a precisely similar position, or one even more sharply and successfully commercialized. Thus, where the Westerner might anticipate finding Jewish enterprises, Jewish successes, and Jewish fortunes, he is faced instead with these olive-complexioned immigrants, who have also been guilty of the unimaginable crime of preserving their distinctiveness in their new home. Thus the Sassoons were on the one hand preceded, on the other far outdone, by Parsee magnates. There was, for example, the great contemporary of David Sassoon's, Sir Jamsetji Jejbhai, father of the Rustamji Jejbhai already mentioned, the immensely wealthy philanthropist, of whom it was said that it was a moral crime to speak of Bombay without mentioning his name. His reputation and his munificence, once legendary, are now only a memory in Europe. This is not the case, however, with one of his co-religionists, Jamsetji Nasarwanji Tata, who also founded a dynasty, the scope of the activities of which put those of the Sassoons almost in the shade. Born in

1839, and beginning his business career when David Sassoon was ending his, he had by the time of his death, in 1904, enormous industrial interests, beginning with cotton mills in Bombay and Nagpur and ending with a company to work the iron-ore of the Central provinces. His elder son, Sir Dorabji Jamsetji Tata (1859–1932), studied at Cambridge, developed his father's conceptions, and established the Indian Institute of Scientific Research at Bangalore: the younger, Sir Ratan Tata (1871–1918), collaborated with his brother, established the Ratan Tata department of Social Science and Administration in the London School of Economics and the Ratan Tata fund at the University of London for studying the conditions of the poor. The Tata enterprises to-day comprise the Tata Iron and Steel Company, that has introduced into India the manufacture of iron and steel on western lines and has created as the centre of the industry an up-to-date city, named Jamshedpur, after its founder: a hydro-electric group comprising four companies which have a practical monopoly of electrical power in Bombay, supplying all told some 400,000 E.H.P.: numerous cotton-mills (the first, the Empress Mills, were inaugurated at Nagpur in 1877) which have revolutionized the cotton industry in India, and challenge comparison with the most up-to-date textile mills in Lancashire: and a few minor enterprises, such as collieries, cement-factories, building-companies, insurance and trading companies, and so on. The combined capital of the enterprises controlled by Tata Sons, Limited, is estimated at some £50,000,000, providing employment for an industrial

community of nearly a quarter of a million. It is not easy to make precise comparisons, but it is probable that this represents a capital value at least five times as great as that of the combined Sassoon businesses in their palmiest days. The relative importance of the latter is therefore nothing like as great as appears to slightly dazzled Occidental eyes. As one considers the comparison, one cannot refrain from speculating whether perhaps the distinctive ability of the Jew does not lie in the manner in which he expends, rather than amasses, wealth.

For it was by this that the Sassoons established their reputation, rather than by the sordid fact of millionairessdom. David Sassoon's tastes were simple, his greatest luxury being an occasional orgy of prayer or the privilege of entertaining a distinguished Rabbi. His eldest son, the heir to great wealth and accustomed from his early manhood to the idea of using it, had more ambitious conceptions. In the new India, where merchants and industrialists were beginning to trespass on the status of at least the lesser Rajahs, he found ample outlet for his luxurious tastes, and he began to play a great role in Society. He had superb villas at Garden Reach, Poona, and at Mahabaleshwar high on the hills above it, where he lavishly entertained fellow-fugitives from the summer heat of the plains. But his principal residence was the incongruously named and incongruously designed mansion of Sans Souci, in the outskirts of Bombay, modelled on an Italian *palazzo* of the Renaissance and called after Frederick the Great's retreat at Potsdam. It was one of the show-places of the city. Here the new

head of the house of Sassoon sometimes indulged in almost fabulous hospitality, his guests including the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) and almost all the other persons of note who visited Bombay. One great ball given here in 1876, in honour of the Viceroy (Lord Northbrook) became almost legendary, and was still remembered a quarter of a century later as the most gorgeous and most brilliant social affair that ever took place in Bombay. The illuminations were on a scale which, before the days of electricity, seemed fantastic, and extended even to the fountains. There were fourteen hundred guests, including nearly all the native princes and Rajahs. Seldom had such a galaxy of Indian brilliance been gathered together in one spot except at a Durbar.

Albert-Abdullah's devotion to Bombay, the city that had given his family freedom, opportunity, and fame, was almost a passion. Such enthusiasm was particularly apposite in his day, for Sir Bartle Frere was now utilizing the money obtained by demolishing the town walls in 1862 by beginning the construction of the series of public buildings that now adorn the city, and the governmental initiative, as usual, stimulated private enterprise. Already in his father's day, the new head of the house had been associated in the establishment of the Mechanics' Institute which has been described above, as well as in some of the other foundations of the patriarch's later years. These were succeeded by a vast series of independent benefactions. Above all, the Jew's passion for learning, the legacy of a hundred generations, stimulated in him the desire to introduce



and extend in India education along Western lines such as he had himself enjoyed only in a modified degree. There already existed at Bombay the Elphinstone High School, endowed by the native communities in memory of the great Governor of Bombay, and who had done so much for native education (it had been founded in 1822 as the Native Education Society's School): but it was till then an inconsiderable and ineffective institution. For some time its reorganization had been under consideration, but nothing had been carried into effect. However, in 1872, as a thank-offering for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from typhoid (the famous occasion when "O'er the wires the tragic message came: 'He is not better: he is much the same' ") Sassoon offered to contribute a lakh of rupees,<sup>1</sup> for reconstructing and remodelling the original foundation. Even with this impetus the government, though not backward in military expenditure, could not see its way to provide the balance needed to complete the work. Accordingly, the scheme languished until the occasion of another royal visit to India a few years later. Sassoon then came forward with a further offer of half a lakh of rupees, on condition that the task should be taken in hand without further delay.

The new Sassoon Building of the school, by G. T. Molesey, then considered one of the chief architectural ornaments of Bombay, and situated on one of its finest sites, was at last opened in 1881

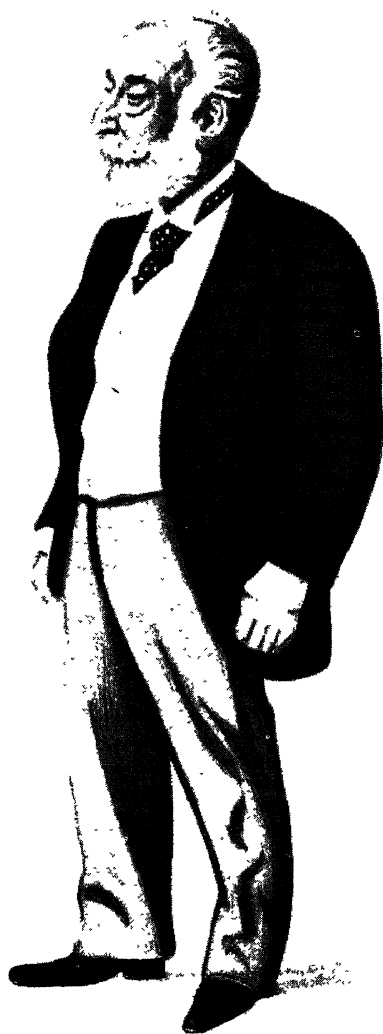
<sup>1</sup> *Lakh* (from the Sanskrit *Lashka*) literally means 100,000, but is generally applied to 100,000 rupees: one thousand *lakhs*, or 10,000,000 rupees, equals 1 crore.

by the Governor, Sir James Ferguson. It immediately took the place that it has occupied ever since as the great Public School of Bombay, and one of the greatest of all Indian institutions of the sort. It has by now given a good education to many thousands of youths belonging to the native communities, at fees within the reach of the middle-class pocket.

This was only one of a vast series of benefactions from Albert-Abdullah to his native city. To commemorate the visit of the Prince of Wales to India in 1875 (when he had been privileged to entertain the royal party) he presented the City of Bombay with a colossal equestrian statue of rather more than double life-size, showing him in the uniform of a Field-Marshal. This, executed by Joseph Edgar Boehm, the fashionable sculptor, was placed in a commanding site in front of the Town Hall. One of the two bas-reliefs on the granite base of the statue depicts the Prince's welcome by the native chiefs on his landing at the dockyard, with the donor's son and eventual heir, Edward (as well as one of the Gubbay family belonging to the firm) in the group behind the royal party. (This decorative trifle cost the donor £11,000—a sum that could certainly have been expended more usefully.) The great organ inside the Town Hall, then considered as fine as any in a similar public institution in Europe, was a further memento from him on the occasion of the visit in March 1870 of Queen Victoria's second son, the Duke of Edinburgh (who subsequently passed from the ranks of the British peerage to become Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha

in succession to the Prince Consort's brother). He founded scholarships at the University and the Art School. His benefactions were not confined to Bombay. They extended throughout India—to Calcutta, Madras, Poona and far beyond. In Albert-Abdullah's native Baghdad, a new school for the Alliance Israélite Universelle, amply endowed, stood as a reminder to the youth of the city of what they might attain by application tempered with piety (or was it piety tempered with application?). And, further off still, in Persia and even in Great Britain, his reputation as philanthropist was widely, and not inexpensively, spread.

His services were not unappreciated and, if he was unable to wear his heart on his sleeve, he was at least able to wear a number of orders on his breast. In 1867, he was created a Companion of the Order of the Star of India. Four years later, in consideration of his work in Persia and his services in the development of Persian commerce, the Shah made him a member of the order of the Lion and Sun. In 1868, he had become a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, a position that he continued to hold for four years. In 1872, he was raised to the Knighthood, as a Knight Companion of the Order of the Star of India, in recognition of his own and his father's beneficent activities. When in the following year he was in England, the City of London conferred the freedom upon him, "in consideration of his munificent and philanthropic exertions in the cause of charity and the promotion of education, more especially, though not exclusively, in our Indian Empire," at that



SIR ALBERT SASSOON  
*(Caricature by "Spy")*



time said to have amounted to £280,000. (It is not quite accurate to state, as is so often done, that this was the first time that an Indian had received this honour: Sir Jamsetji Jejbhai, the Parsee philanthropist, had been voted the Freedom in 1855, though he did not come to take it up in person.) The ceremony was expensively and ostentatiously performed; well-turned Victorian periods particularized the "cosmopolitan and unsectarian scope" of the philanthropist's liberality, and his endowments of "schools for Indian and Jewish children, colleges for the higher education of native youth, institutes for mechanics, hospitals for the diseased, retreats for the convalescent, reformatories for the depraved": and there was the invariable sybarite sequel. It was incidentally (as the official orators did not fail to accentuate) the first time that any person belonging to what they termed the "Hebrew persuasion" had received the Freedom of the City in the honorary form.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As early as the seventeenth century, Jews had been admitted in some exceptional cases to the Freedom of the City of London in the normal process. (An outstanding instance was Rowland Gideon, father of Sampson Gideon, the financial mainstay of the Government at the time of the 'forty-five rebellion.) But in 1737, the Corporation ordered an inquiry to be made into the "scandal" caused by the granting of the freedom to Jews, and ordered action to be taken to prevent any recurrence. Towards the close of the century, the same bar was extended to baptized Jews (this was perhaps the only parallel that there has ever been in England to the contemporary German racial legislation). This lasted for only forty-one years, and in 1826 the Court of Aldermen reluctantly admitted certain baptized Jews to the Freedom. At the close of 1830, in accordance with the recommendations of a committee set up in the previous year to inquire into the subject, the Common Council enacted that henceforth any person who took up the Freedom could take the requisite Oath in a form

After 1872, Sir Albert Sassoon (as he now was) was more or less permanently domiciled in England, where the firm's activities were henceforth centred. The second of eight brothers, Elias, was (as we shall see) otherwise employed. The third, Sassoon, had died some while before: the fourth and fifth, Reuben and Abraham (Arthur) were already settled in England. The management of the affairs of the parent-house in India hence devolved on the sixth of the brothers. Or was it the seventh? History is indeterminate regarding the half-hour or so which would decide this question, for Solomon David Sassoon was one of a pair of twins (the other was Aaron, who lived in Brighton, and took no part whatever in the family business). He had been born at Bombay in 1841, and like all his brothers had been sent early in life (in his case, before he had completed his twentieth year) to China. Here, at Shanghai and Hong Kong, he spent many years, ultimately being in sole charge of the local interests of the family business and thus enjoying the consideration due to one of the most important figures in the foreign mercantile community in the Far East. He played too a prominent part in social life, and was by virtue of descent and position the leading personality in the local Jewish community.

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agreeable to his religious convictions. Jews immediately took advantage of this, and the pioneer among them, David Salomons, became Sheriff in 1835 in the teeth of much opposition, Alderman at last in 1845, and Lord Mayor in 1855. ("Thank God we have got a gentleman at last," one of his former opponents was heard to say after hearing his first official speech.) But it is curious that forty years should have elapsed between the introduction of the new form of oath and the admission of a Jew to the Honorary Freedom.

In 1875, at the mature age of thirty-four (men ripened to manhood early in that climate) he returned to India. After a pleasure-trip throughout the sub-continent, every part of which he came to know intimately, followed by a period of rest, he assumed charge of the head office of David Sassoon & Company. He remained managing partner from 1877 to the time of his death, still comparatively a young man, in 1894.<sup>1</sup> Of David Sassoon's eight sons, it was he, after his eldest brother, who contributed most to the stability and reputation of the family business, being deflected neither by personal ambitions nor by society claims. Moreover, he took the part in public life which was expected of a member of his house. Besides his activities in the family businesses, he was a Director of the Bank of Bombay, one of the Bombay Port Trustees, and a member of the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, and was twice nominated an Additional Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Of the eight brothers he maintained most faithfully his father's unswerving devotion to the traditions and forms of Judaism. Punctilious in his observances, he had a private synagogue attached to his palatial house, Nepean Lodge, on Malabar Hill: he took a lead in all Jewish activities, such as the local branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association:

<sup>1</sup> The members of the firm included, besides David Sassoon's sons, the husbands or sons of his daughters. At this time they were Sir Albert Sassoon, with his brothers, Reuben and Arthur, and his son, Edward, all in London: with Solomon Sassoon, S. M. Moses, Selim S. Solomon and S. E. Shellim in Bombay. The firm's offices, and those of the subordinate companies, were, at this time, at 4 Forbes Street, Bombay.



and he was a good Hebraist and a competent Talmudic student, transmitting his enthusiasm moreover to his children after him, his daughters as well as his son.

He married his kinswoman, Farha, or Flora,<sup>1</sup> Gubbay, of whom it was said that she walked like a queen, talked like a sage, and entertained like an Oriental potentate. More will be said of her later, in another connexion.<sup>2</sup> But her part in the history of David Sassoon & Company cannot be neglected here. On her husband's death, there was no member of the family of the older generation left alive in India, while her own son, named after his grandfather, was still a minor. This remarkable woman, filled with the pride as well as the learning of her race, determined to take her husband's task upon her own shoulders instead of allowing them to devolve upon someone who did not belong to the family. For ten years, accordingly, she managed the widespread affairs of David Sassoon & Company in India with conspicuous skill and success. She was at the helm in those anxious days in Bombay during the plague of 1897, when there was a wholesale flight of labour; in 1898, when riots broke out among the Mohammedan cotton operatives and several Europeans received fatal injuries: and in the following year, when owing to the suicidal increase in the number of the mills, the fall in the price of silver and the glutting of the Chinese market, there was a widespread crisis in Bombay and many mills

<sup>1</sup> The names, common among women of the Sassoon family, are identical in meaning.

<sup>2</sup> See pages 129-30 and 137-40.

were nearly idle. When at length she relinquished control, the fabulous days of the firm were ended.

On Christmas Eve, 1901, David Sassoon & Company, Limited, merchants, were incorporated as a Private Limited Company, with a capital of £500,000. The firm was henceforth impersonal, the Eight Sons having given place to half a million pound shares.



## CHAPTER IV

### E. D. SASSOON AND COMPANY

THE crest of the Sassoon family shows a dove of peace, bearing a sprig of olive in its beak. The salient feature in the Rothschild coat-of-arms, on the other hand, is a hand holding five arrows, typical of the Five Brothers, unbreakable so long as they remained as one. Had the Sassoons chosen to imitate this, seven arrows would have figured instead of five; the eighth would have been shown elegantly aloof, as though questioning the truth of the adage. For one of the many points in which the Rothschilds of the East differed from their prototypes of the West was that while the original family business remained (unlike that of the Rothschilds) strictly unified and the far-flung branches that it established continued to be strictly subordinate to the parent house; one of the brothers branched off on his own account, setting up a rival firm which had no connexion whatsoever with the original business, and in a brief space of time all but excelled it.

The leader of the secession was the patriarch's second son and fourth child, Elias David Sassoon, born in 1820, when his grandfather had but recently lost his position of pre-eminence at Baghdad, and named after one of the latter's brothers.

He seems to have displayed particularly high business ability, and when in 1844 his father decided to open up a branch of his business in China, it was Elias, not his elder brother, whom he sent to supervise the new venture. The energetic young Oriental (he was not yet twenty-five years of age) performed his mission with conspicuous success. He spent many months in uncomfortable sailing-boats, on his way from port to port, notwithstanding the immense difficulty of maintaining the Jewish ritual observances under such conditions. But he was magnificently successful; branches and agencies were opened up in one commercial centre after the other; and the fabulous days of David Sassoon & Company began with the *Odyssey* of Elias in the Far East. After his return to India, leaving a selection of other members of the family to supervise operations in the off-shoots he had established, he became his father's right-hand man. During the latter's last years he was partly responsible for conducting the parent establishment in Bombay. It was largely due, it is said, to his coolness and foresight that the firm did not become involved, like most of the other leading houses in the city, in the share-mania of 1861-5, when the American Civil War had created a boom on Indian cotton, and in the subsequent disastrous crash which involved most of them.<sup>1</sup>

On his father's death, Elias found himself relegated to a place which he considered inferior to his abilities. His elder brother, Abdullah (he was not yet Albert), was now at the head of the firm. The

<sup>1</sup> See pages 50-3 and 76-7.

latter was in the prime of life, and did not have to be dependent (like his father) on the younger brother, whose superabundant energy perhaps found the cautious methods of his senior a little irksome. We have to assume fraternal disputes, followed by quarrels: and after little more than two years, in 1867, Elias took the obvious step. He was already a wealthy man, like all of the brothers, with ample capital of his own. Taking his twenty-four-year-old first-born, Jacob, into partnership, he opened at Bombay a rival firm bearing his own name, Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Co., carrying on identical activities and trading with the same centres. Contrary to what is generally believed, and sometimes stated even in authoritative works, there is no association whatsoever between the two firms except that of name, their reciprocal relations having long been those of bitter rivals rather than of colleagues.

But why confine himself to Bombay? After all, the Far Eastern branches of the parent house had been established through his energy, and he had, as it were, a prescriptive natural right to establish himself there. He had to hand, moreover (and this could not be said to an equal extent of any of his brothers) the same potential instruments for expansion as his father: for his wife, Leah Gubbay, presented him all told with six sons, besides his three daughters, and they were beginning to arrive at the age when they could take an active and responsible share in the activities of his firm. In the year after he started his business, therefore, he dispatched his son Jacob on a trip to the Far East,

similar to that which he had himself undertaken a generation before but under circumstances infinitely more comfortable. In almost every city where the parent firm had branches or agencies, especially Hong Kong, Shanghai, and the Treaty Ports, Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Company now became established, somewhat to the perplexity of old-established clients of the paternal business. Relations were opened up with Baghdad, the cradle of the family, where the original house might have aspired to be undisturbed. Within a very few years the operations and agencies of the new firm had spread to Europe, and even to some places in Africa and America, where David Sassoon & Company were as yet unknown. When Elias died in 1880, in his sixtieth year, while on a visit to Colombo, he had been established in business on his own account for only thirteen years, but it was already a gigantic concern, with connexions in every part of the world. In all these branches, the tradition of the parent establishment was followed. The managers and clerks were almost all Jews, brought out from India and Baghdad, who worshipped in synagogues established by their employers and were sustained in all the vicissitudes of life by charities set up by them. It was not only a commercial house. It conducted considerable banking operations as well—not unlike those of any similar establishment except for the fact that, with typical Sassoon loyalty to tradition and to its Jewish origin, the cheques bore the name of the firm in Hebrew as well as in English.

A few months before Elias's death, his son Jacob

(known as Jacob Elias Sassoon) had returned to India from the Far East. He and his three surviving younger brothers, Edward Elias Sassoon (born in 1853), Meyer Elias Sassoon (born in 1855), and David Elias Sassoon (born in 1866), were now in control of the business: but the mantle of Elias, accompanied by the main responsibility, devolved upon the eldest, who inherited all of his father's and grandfather's business ability and was indubitably the outstanding Sassoon of the third generation in the world of affairs. It was to him that the development of the firm of E. D. Sassoon & Company to a house of the very first rank, in industry as well as commerce, was due. He was handicapped in later life by failing eyesight, but this increased rather than diminished the energy that he was able to devote to the business. His knowledge of economic conditions in the Middle East was incomparable, and his influence was felt on the commercial life of the entire hemisphere. He extended the firm's operations to Japan, the Persian Gulf and Arabia, besides setting up branches at Calcutta, Karachi, and Rangoon. In London, palatial offices (of course closed on the Sabbath) were opened in Fenchurch Street; there was another agency at Manchester, and there were correspondents everywhere. As we have seen, thanks to the relative prolificity of Elias Sassoon, as compared with some of his brothers, the firm he founded was able to follow the example of his father, using members of the family to secure completely trustworthy co-operation in distant parts. In the eighteen-eighties, Jacob Sassoon and his brother Meyer directed the interests of the firm



in London, and Edward in China, the parent house at Bombay being controlled at that time by their brother-in-law, Aaron Moses Gubbay, and one of their Ezra relatives. Later, Jacob returned to India, his place in London being taken by his brother Edward. The Shanghai interests were henceforth managed by one of their Baghdadi connexions, Silas Aaron Haroon, who had the unusual distinction of serving simultaneously on the French and English municipal councils and was said to be the richest man east of Suez. (He died in 1931, a reputed Buddhist, leaving some marital perplexity, an enormous fortune, and an interesting judicial problem which provided a rich and protracted harvest for lawyers from different lands.)

The centre of the firm's activities remained however at Bombay, where from its offices in Rampart Row it played an even greater part than the parent house under Albert-Abdullah in the expansion of the cotton industry, which as has been indicated was the chief feature in the economic development of the city and its surroundings in the past three-quarters of a century. In 1880, within a few months of his father's death, Jacob Sassoon bought his first mill, the Alexandra Mill, patriotically named after the Princess of Wales. It proved so remarkably successful that shortly after he built a new one, in which he installed the most up-to-date Lancashire machinery—the E. D. Sassoon Mill. Hitherto, the dyeing operations had been conducted under other auspices, losing thereby a great deal of the profit; the establishment of the mill was therefore followed by that of the E. D. Sassoon Dye Works,

at the time the most efficient of their kind in India. Later on, there were set up the Jacob Sassoon Mill—the largest in the country, with its 100,000 spindles and 2,000 looms; and finally, the male family names having been exhausted, the Rachel Sassoon Mill, called after his wife, Rachel Isaacs, daughter of Simon Isaacs of Calcutta, and a near relative of his before the marriage. The Dye Works were, of course, developed and extended to keep pace with this enormous expansion. Later on, the main E. D. Sassoon spinning interests were consolidated in a new concern, with a total capital of 25,000,000 rupees (or two and a half crores, to use the picturesque local jargon<sup>1</sup>). It controls to-day 6,498 looms and nearly a quarter of a million spindles, and is incomparably the most important concern of the sort in Bombay from the numerical point of view, its nearest rival being the Bombay Dyeing Company, with its 184,184 spindles and 4,850 looms (at present, however, in a far more prosperous condition). Besides this major concern, the Edward Sassoon Mills and the Meyer Sassoon Mills maintain their existence independently. In their hey-day, the mills under the direct control of Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Company employed upwards of 15,000 hands, and the parent house of David Sassoon & Company was in this respect utterly outstripped. The work was conducted largely under English supervisors, large numbers of whom found employment in the Sassoon Mills. But there was one fundamental difference from the Lancashire system. Here, all operations were combined:

<sup>1</sup> See page 86 (footnote).

raw cotton went in at one end of the works, coming out at the other as goods packed ready for shipment. In the history of the cotton textile industry in Western India, the name of Jacob Sassoon stands out more prominently than that of any other single individual, not excepting even his Parsee rival, Jamsetji Tata.

Capital, like gold, has magnetic qualities: and a great business demands facilities for transferring funds from one place to another, for employing surplus sums, and for raising short-term loans. Jacob Sassoon's requirements, which had made it necessary for his firm to branch out into banking activities as well (ultimately, as we shall see, to become its main interest) led him to conceive the idea of a great Exchange Bank for East Indian business, with headquarters in London and branches throughout India. This was the genesis of the Eastern Bank, Limited, registered in 1909, with a capital amounting to £2,000,000, in which he was largely interested and of which he was a director, as is a member of the family to the present day—yet another great enterprise which may be ascribed to the fertile genius of the Sassoons.<sup>1</sup>

The high commercial reputation that the firm enjoyed can best be gauged from the attacks made upon it. In 1888, a certain I. G. Thirkell published at the *Celestial Empire* office in Shanghai a work, intended to be scurrilous, entitled *Some Queer Stories of Benjamin David Benjamin and Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Co.* If this is the worst arraignment that

<sup>1</sup> The head offices of the Eastern Bank are in London, but it gravitates towards India, Iraq, Ceylon, and Singapore.

malevolence could compile, the record of the firm must have been extraordinarily good. The worst anecdote retailed in the work relates to the captain of one of the firm's junks, who raised a contribution from the entire crew to purchase a lottery ticket and, finding that it drew a prize, absconded with the proceeds. But it is hardly probable (nor is it suggested) that his employers connived at this action. It is remarkable, in point of fact, how insubstantial are most of the accusations made by gossip against Sassoon business methods; particularization always recedes, like a will-o'-the-wisp or the temptations of Tantalus, before the thirsty investigator. (Not long since, when there was a far-reaching business-scandal at Bombay, theirs was the only house that had sufficient confidence and sufficient courage to come forward with evidence.)

Jacob Sassoon's failing sight, and his wife's ill-health (she died in India in April 1911, while he was undergoing an ophthalmic operation at Wiesbaden) combined to undermine his attempt in the eighteen-eighties to follow the exodus of his tribe to England, and made it difficult for him even to take any part in public life locally. Though he lived in great style, with three magnificent houses all most incongruously named (Braganza Hall, Bombay; Ashley House, Poona; and Glen Ogle, Mahableshtar)<sup>1</sup> he was unable to get full enjoyment

<sup>1</sup> Braganza Hall was not quite such a curiosity of nomenclature as might appear at the first blush, for Bombay had come into English hands as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza (administered, incidentally, by Portuguese Jews, or rather Marranos, led by Diego da Silva, the Portuguese Sassoon of his day). Ashley House was clearly named after

out of them. But charity is, fortunately, one of the few pleasures of life that cannot be restricted by physical disability, and in this he indulged to the full, in many lands, in the same pious spirit as his grandfather, the original David Sassoon, had done. Synagogues in cities as far removed as Bombay and Shanghai, cemeteries, funds for feeding the poor on the Mosaic feast-days and for supplying the aged and disabled with the necessities of life, liberal contributions to charities in all parts of the globe, and above all, a free school at Bombay, for 300 boys and girls, endowed with no less than 2,000,000 rupees, and an institution at Colaba for the communal paupers, testified to the intensity of his Jewish feelings and interests—not so common by any means in the third generation of courtiers and politicians as they had been in the first and second. But his general philanthropic activities were on an even vaster scale. He liberally supported, of course, all the various family charities—the David Sassoon Hospital and the Sassoon Infirmary and Leper Asylum at Poona, the Sassoon Mechanics' Institute and Sassoon Reformatory at Bombay, as well as the institutions in which a large-scale shipper would naturally be interested, such as the Sailors' Home, and of course, the Elphinstone High School. In addition to all this he gave the first impetus to the Central Nursing Association associated with the name of Lady Lamington, by presenting her

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Sassoon David Sassoon's Tudor residence, Ashley Park, near Walton-on-Thames. But it is difficult to see any excuse for calling a Jewish-owned Indian villa by a Scottish name, and it is to be hoped that the title was acquired with the house.

husband, Lord Lamington (Governor of Bombay in 1903–1907), with a lakh of rupees for the purpose. A greater benefaction by far, which in the end totalled nearly 2,000,000 rupees, was the construction of an up-to-date hospital for Europeans in the compound of the Sassoon Hospital established by his grandfather at Poona. It was furnished with special provision for Jews, who were to be given special diet in accordance with their ritual requirements (and incidentally had their continental status clearly established thereby). This foundation, the Jacob Sassoon European General Hospital, was intended to commemorate the visit to India of the Prince and Princess of Wales, who publicly expressed their appreciation of the compliment and the act of benevolence. Later on, when as King George V and Queen Mary they again visited India for the Durbar, he gave £20,000 towards the erection of a pavilion at Bombay to commemorate their landing. The foundation on which he most prided himself, however, was educational—a Central College of Science at Bombay, which cost him ten lakhs of rupees (then £66,666). All told, his benefactions (continued munificently under his will, and still administered) ran into many hundred thousand pounds.

Since 1872 there had been a Knight in the Sassoon family, in the person of Sir Albert Abdullah Sassoon, who was advanced to the dignity of baronetcy (of Kensington Gore and Eastern Terrace, Brighton) in 1880. In 1909 (it was the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the assumption of the Government of India by the

Crown, when a special Honours List was issued), his nephew, Jacob Elias Sassoon, of the City of Bombay (how much more dignified this sounded than the two street addresses in England!), was elevated to the same honour in recognition of his public spirit and philanthropic activities. The firm of E. D. Sassoon & Co. was thus placed on the same social footing as the parent house. However, since his only son had died in infancy, the baronetcy passed on Sir Jacob's death, in 1916, to his brother, Edward Elias Sassoon, born in 1853, who since he had reached manhood had played an important, though subordinate, part in the activities of the firm, first in China and then in London, together with his surviving younger brothers, Meyer and David.<sup>1</sup>

With these three, the centre of activity of the

<sup>1</sup> Elias David Sassoon had two other sons besides the four mentioned. In memory of one of them, Joseph, who died at Shanghai in 1863, his father established the Chinchpogli cemetery in Bombay. There were also three daughters, the eldest of whom, Hannah (1857-1921), married Sir Sassoon David, first baronet, of Calcutta (1849-1916), also a mill-owner on a great scale, Sheriff of Bombay in 1905 and a member of the Indian Legislative Council, a man deservedly famous for his philanthropy. (In 1911, on the occasion of the Royal visit to India, he made a donation of £53,000 for the purpose of establishing settlements for landless wanderers, and left large sums for charitable purposes out of which a Synagogue was constructed in London.) Their son is Sir Percival David Ezekiel David (born 1892), the expert in Oriental art (who has presented a number of Buddhas to Chinese temples but is less memorable for synagogal munificence), who is in consequence a great-grandson of the original David Sassoon. Lady Sassoon David's sister, Sarah, married her kinsman, Nissim Sassoon, of Calcutta, a grandson of David Sassoon's brother, Saleh: she was the mother of Alfred Sassoon (see page 137), a very minor poet of Edwardian days.

progeny of Elias David Sassoon, too, passed to England, like that of his brothers, and social diversions disputed for their interest with increasing success with the calls of business. In 1920, Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Company, Bankers and Merchants, were incorporated (as David Sassoon & Company had been nineteen years before) as a Limited Company.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The present head of the firm is Sir Ellice Victor Sassoon, for whom see pages 222—228.



## CHAPTER V

### ENGLAND

IN 1858, David Sassoon, finding that the affairs of his house were prospering, that expansion in the Far East demanded an ever-increasing quantity of imports from England, and imagining that it must be possible to develop a direct export trade in Indian commodities and raw materials, took what was to prove a decisive step in the history of his family. Recalling his third son, Sassoon, from Shanghai, he dispatched him to London to supervise the firm's interests at the very centre of the world's economy. (A separate chapter of this work will be devoted to him and his progeny.<sup>1</sup>) Before long, the mass of business to be transacted in London had grown to such an extent that in 1867, three years after the patriarch's death, the fourth brother, Reuben<sup>2</sup> (who likewise had served his apprenticeship in China), went to England to assist in the work. Now that David Sassoon was no more, the firm's centre of gravity was no longer necessarily situated in India, and with the passage of time was attracted more and more to the capital of the Empire: the activities in which it was engaged being

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII ("The Sassoons of Ashley Park").

<sup>2</sup> He was named after an uncle, one of David Sassoon's brothers, who died in the plague of 1802.

mainly the Indian produce business, the import of raw cotton, and the export of mill supplies for the Bombay looms. After the eldest of the family, Sir Albert Abdullah Sassoon, settled in England in the eighteen-seventies, Leadenhall Street, in London, was the centre of the firm's transactions instead of Forbes Street, Bombay, and the West End of its social life instead of Poona.

In the end, all of the eight brothers drifted to England, with the exception of Elias, who had set up in business with magnificent success on his own account<sup>1</sup>, and Solomon, who managed the affairs of the parent house in India from 1877 onwards.<sup>2</sup> The remaining six were domiciled in England, lived in England, died in England, and were buried in England. Three of them, at least, played a part in English social life which can be described without exaggeration as spectacular. Moreover, the offspring of the two brothers who remained in India subsequently succumbed to the fascination of the imperious and imperial city. Even David Sassoon's widow, who had accompanied her son Reuben to Europe in 1867, found life there more pleasing than in the East, and remained, basking in her sons' reflected glory, for nearly twenty years, until she died at Brighton in 1886, nearly sixty years after her marriage. Thus the family which removed in the eighteen-thirties to Bombay from Baghdad, where they had been settled for untold generations, took a more revolutionary step in the second half of the nineteenth century and, removing from Bombay to London, became English.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter III.

But for one factor, this process of reacclimatization, so rapid and so successful, could hardly have been achieved or even contemplated. We always tend to consider Europe and Asia as two separate geographical units, whose inhabitants are divided from one another ethnically, culturally, and even mentally. This is quite unjustified. The peoples of the world are inextricably intermingled (there is Arab blood in plenty in Spain, Turkish blood in the Balkans, Slav blood in Germany, Crusading blood in Palestine, and blood of every conceivable origin in Italy, left by violent invaders and careless pilgrims). The only more or less water-tight ethnical dividing-lines are those between the white races, the yellow, and the black. (The "Aryan" so beloved of contemporary German scholars is no more than a philological hypothesis, and not as they try to make out an ethnographical fact.) Our culture, on the other hand, is not in any narrow sense "European," as it is generally termed, for it owes too much to areas outside Europe. If we desire to label it, we must call it "western": and its origins are to be looked for in the Mediterranean basin as a whole, without paying attention to artificial distinctions, created by geographers rather than by geography. The Hellenic and Latin cultures on which European civilization is based (it is better not to confuse the issue for the moment by speaking of the Biblical heritage, all-important though it was) produced some of their finest fruits on its southern and eastern shores, and were themselves dependent to a large extent on Persian, Babylonian and Egyptian (though not in the slightest degree on

“Nordic”) elements. Even European chronology is based on a system preserved by a Greek-speaking African who lived in Palestine, while the very name “Europe” is of Palestinian origin, deriving from the legendary daughter of a Phoenician ruler who was raped, in the pleasanter sense of the word, by Zeus. (A point, this, that Herr Hitler might take to heart.)

The dividing-line between the culture of the West and that of the East (if there is one) is hence not to be fixed where the conventional Europe ends and the conventional Asia begins, but at a point a good deal further removed towards the sun-rise. Palestine, lying on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean (which, in fact, provided the common store with elements as important as those of Greece and Rome), constitutes an integral part of the vast cradle in which modern Western culture developed its vigour. In consequence, those who originated from ancient Palestine—that is, the Jews—have for two and a half thousand years or more played their part in, and been part of, the Western world, of which they were denizens when the Germans were skin-clad savages and the Magyars wandering nomads on the Caspian steppes. Hence it was not, after all, so surprising that families like the Sassoons, though denizenized in Asia from time immemorial, should have been able to enter into Western life so readily and so completely. As Jews, they were essentially Westerners, notwithstanding the fact that the fortunes of history had carried them in the first instance to the Orient and not the Occident. It would hardly have

been conceivable for other inhabitants of Bombay, whether belonging to the native element or to the newer arrivals from the Persian Gulf, to have entered in the same way into English life and made the same contributions to the English heritage (the Aga Khan has remained, after all, the Aga Khan). The reason that the Sassoons were able to achieve the seemingly impossible was that for all their picturesque Oriental veneer, they belonged essentially, unlike their oppressors in Baghdad or their neighbours in India, to the Western world.

Notwithstanding these comforting considerations, it was an astonishing external metamorphosis. A photograph is extant taken shortly before his death showing David Sassoon, the original patriarch, surrounded by his eight sons. All, like him, are eminently hirsute; all, like him, are clothed in long Oriental robes and are protected from the rays of the sun by elaborate turbans. The group could very well represent some scene out of the *Adventures of Haji Baba of Ispahan*, but for the fact that one of the sons, greatly daring and elegantly unconventional, has put on full Occidental evening-dress—swallow-tail coat, boiled shirt and white tie all complete—in honour of the occasion. (The time is presumably 11 a.m., or thereabouts.) As one looks at this picture, one thinks of what the future had in store for these turbanned figures: English titles, Scottish shooting-boxes, intimacy with successive Kings of England, legendary entertainments for the English nobility, the ultimate procreation of a procreator of a Lord Great Chamberlain. Such fortunes have been built up more than

once before, but such a transfiguration of turbaned Orientals into English *epigoni* is surely unique in history.

They arrived in England, of course, at a particularly happy moment, at the height of the age of *laissez-faire* and of the unchallenged supremacy of the Manchester School, when the country followed what is now regarded as the incredibly stupid policy of accepting advantages from all quarters, giving talent an opportunity regardless of its origin, and attempting to profit from the specialist qualifications even of foreigners. When in 1873 Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, became the leader of fashionable life in London, even the aristocracy yielded to the new notions, and the old hide-bound "Society" of allied and exclusive families was invaded by, and ultimately merged with, the "Smart Set" that centred about Marlborough House. Elements of non-English origin were prominent in this new Society: and the American twang (perhaps because it was at the time comparatively unfamiliar) attracted fully as much attention, and caused fully as much head-shaking in the drawing-rooms of the dowagers, as the gutturalities that betrayed a Continental origin a good deal nearer home. Jews, not long since given their first opportunity after centuries of immurement in their Ghettos, and showing something of the optimistic ebullience of prisoners released from gaol without a stain on their name after an unjust sentence, were also prominent. They had made good, they had prospered, they had shown their ability and their benevolence: and why should they not derive the

same pleasures and advantages as other men? Society, encouraged by the example of the tolerant Prince of Wales (an aspect to which special attention must be devoted later on<sup>1</sup>) saw no reason why they should not, providing only that they did not neglect their cellars.<sup>2</sup>

A mildly anti-Semitic visitor to London, who disguised his identity under the pseudonym, *A Foreign Resident*, has recorded his impressions on this subject in a book, *Society in the New Reign* (London, 1904), which deserves more attention than it has received from students of social history at the beginning of this century. It puts a different light upon the once-decried royal familiarities and their outcome:

Say what you will, the Jews are the salt of smart Society, and the City the one intellectual stimulus that its faculties know . . . Such humanising influences as leaven fashionable London to-day come largely from the Jewish element. Apart from the fostering Hebrew, English art and music could hardly live in the English capital . . . No one expected or wished Edward VII to pose as the regenerator of Society . . . The rich men of the East are to-day only where he found them on his accession. With the high tact which keeps Jew and Gentile alike in high good humour, he has contrived to make them pay in philanthropy for what they have received in honours . . . To talk of Jew influence materialising Society in London is silly *blague*. The Israelite

<sup>1</sup> See the next chapter, "The Royal Box."

<sup>2</sup> As this work passes through the Press, it occurs to me that it may be necessary to point out that the word "cellar" in the nineteenth century connoted wines, not air-raid precautions.

might rather claim to be considered a spiritualising force. Not only from Houndsditch to Hyde Park Corner does he supply a whetstone for the wits of his adopted countrymen, but he gives the self-sufficient islanders the few opportunities they enjoy of meeting men distinguished in art and letters, who, but for their Jewish *proxeni* in Piccadilly, would never entrust their existence to the British climate.

In the ranks of these persons here described there were a number of entirely different elements hardly distinguishable in the eyes of the outside world. There were old-established Anglo-Jewish families—some of the southern (*Sephardi*) element, such as the Montefiores, and some of the northern or *Ashkenazi*, such as the Goldsmids, with the Rothschilds, of course, looming in the foreground. Then there were more recent arrivals from the Continent, almost exclusively identified with the new international banking-houses, such as the Bischoffsheims, the Speyers, the Sterns, the De Worms (who alone of those mentioned here were merchants, not bankers). The Sassoons, who had so recently landed from the distant Orient and still bore traces of their origin, stood in a category by themselves, their background differing from that of their co-religionists who had preceded them to a far greater extent than that of the latter did from the general background of English society. Nevertheless, when Sassoon David Sassoon arrived in England in 1858 he found the ground fully prepared. (In that very year, the first Jew had been admitted to Parliament, after a thirty-years' struggle, and the political emancipation of Anglo-Jewry was



thereby completed.) In that good-natured, tolerant age, when people had agreed to overlook the religion that their associates professed, no one was inclined to examine over-meticulously their precise degree of pigmentation. In the course of the next two or three decades, accordingly, the Sassoons came to be numbered among the best-known hosts of the new Society that, unlike the old, depended on commerce rather than on land.

It was a curious, and amazingly sudden, revolution. In India, the Baghdadi Jew was not quite accepted in European circles.<sup>1</sup> (Not that this was an unmixed disadvantage; a guide-book of 1880 describes the Bycullah Club at Bombay, the hub of British society, as "inconveniently situated, very exclusive, and subject to disagreeable odours.") But these same persons who suffered from discrimination in India found themselves in England not merely accepted, but even courted, by those who on the other side of the world cold-shouldered them.

Their homes were luxurious. The equipages were the most elegant that could be seen in the Park, and were seldom absent from it. Their women-folk were decked in jewellery worth a king's ransom, but more reminiscent of rajahs than of kings (the great ropes of pearls, of hardly credible size and perfection were especially famous). Their cuisines retained a sufficient touch of India to interest jaded appetites; the cellars were well stocked and the

<sup>1</sup> It is said that the resplendent Taj Mahal Hotel at Bombay was the *revanche* of the Sassoon and Tata families for the treatment they had received, not so very long ago, at what was formerly the first hotel in the city.

cigars superb: and Society was not slow to unbend to these new arrivals sufficiently to enjoy the extremely pleasurable hospitality that they offered so lavishly. Hence their circle of acquaintance expanded with a prodigious rapidity. When Sir Albert Sassoon first arrived in London in the eighteen-seventies his bosom friend was a co-religionist of his of very different antecedents and interests—Joseph Moses Levy, founder of the *Daily Telegraph*, and thereby of popular journalism in England, whose son (in order to qualify for an avuncular bequest) added Lawson to his hereditary name and subsequently became the first Lord Burnham. Later on, his visiting-list grew to such proportions that it included most of those persons in London society who had no prejudices and good palates, and his entertainments became proverbial. His wife could not however share his triumphs, as (unlike most of the family) she was unable to bear the rigours of the English climate, and continued to live, in sumptuous style, in her various Indian residences.

For Sir Albert Sassoon, Society life was an incident, as it was, for example, to men like Sir Blundell Maple, who provided the more condescending part of the peerage with its furniture by day and its entertainment by night. But, for two out of the other four surviving Sassoon brothers who made their homes in England, Arthur and Reuben, it came to be their principal, if not their sole, absorption. It was said that Society at this period took nothing seriously but its pleasures. Of these two brothers it was certainly true. They gave up their business activities almost entirely; they

devoted to their social life all of the energy, and no small part of the ability, that their father had employed on the acquisition of the wealth which they expended. And they achieved a success which, half a century earlier or half a century later, would have been unimaginable.

Had David Sassoon lived another ten years, this would probably not have happened. For it was his marriage that directed the attention of his fifth son to the new world that lay before him. His elder brothers had all married into their own circle, choosing their life-partners (or having them chosen vicariously) among the wealthy Baghdadi Jewish families settled in India—Moise, Gubbay, Reuben and Ezekiel. But the tastes of Arthur (he had been Abraham Shalom at the outset of his career) were different. He had been born in Bombay when his father had already become affluent, and unlike his elder brothers he had been brought up from the very beginning in an atmosphere of great wealth. He was, moreover, in all probability the first of his entire family for untold generations (perhaps for all time) to set foot in Europe: for he had been sent over by his father as early as 1855—three years before his brother Sassoon—to be educated in London under the unexceptionable tutelage of Dr Hermann Adler, son of the Chief Rabbi, and in due course his successor. Subsequently, he returned to the East and served his apprenticeship, like his brothers, in the various family counting-houses in India and in China. But his tastes and interests were polarized west of Suez, and he seized the first opportunity to follow the family tendency and

come to England. Now he was transmuted definitely into Arthur Abraham (the latter name was generally omitted) instead of Abraham, and he settled down to become an Englishman.

Unlike all of his elder brothers, moreover, he chose his bride from an Occidental Jewish family. (The only one of the eight brothers besides him who followed this example was the youngest, Farraj Hayim, or Frederick, who some twenty years later married Jeanette, daughter of Edward Raphael, a member of an old Anglo-Jewish family that had set up a banking-house in London as early as 1787.) On January 19th, 1873, he was married at Trieste to Eugenie Louise, daughter of Achille Perugia, at the residence of her uncle, Gustave Landauer. (not of course the German political extremist murdered in 1919, who was only three years old at the time). It was an old Italian family to which the bride belonged, probably settled in the peninsula since the first centuries of the Christian era, and long resident in the Umbrian city from which they derived their name. They were subsequently to be traced at Mantua, where they were printers and scholars over more generations than one. At Trieste itself, the Jews constituted the oldest and most fervently Italian element, to whose exertions it was due, above all, that their city returned ultimately to Italy. (The country showed its gratitude, under Mussolini, by making life impossible for them, on the score that they were incompletely Italian. This, for men who had fasted in their synagogue under the nose of the Austrian police when news arrived of any Italian setback in the field,

who had risked their necks by joining the Italian forces, who had shed their blood on every Italian battlefield, and who had been principally responsible for the persistence of Italian irridentism in the city.)

There is no need to tell those who have seen her of Mrs Arthur Sassoon's beauty, dignity and charm, even now when she is descending in the vale of the years. They are so striking as to make it easy to understand, even after this great lapse of time (it is now sixty-eight years since her marriage) the impression that she made in the Sassoon circle when she first arrived in London. It was as yet a comparatively small circle, but through her it expanded rapidly; for she was connected with many of the well-known Austrian-Jewish families, the most important among which (it is enough to mention the Rothschilds) had their relations in London too. She soon counted among her close friends Hannah de Rothschild, daughter of Baron Mayer, the idol of the Turf and the first Jew to own a Derby winner, who died in the following year (Hannah subsequently became, in 1878, Countess of Rosebery, and was mother both of the present Earl and of the Marchioness of Crewe). In consequence, when her lovely younger sister, Maria Perugia, came to visit her not long after, she saw a great deal of the Rothschild family, hunted with them, rode with them, drove with them, and danced with them. The result was seen on that January day in 1881, in the middle of one of the bitterest winters on record in England, when she was married to Leopold de Rothschild, the youngest and most popular of the three partners

who now controlled the famous banking-business at New Court. It was a great occasion; and the Prince of Wales, the bridegroom's close friend, was present not only at the ceremony in the Synagogue, but also at the subsequent wedding-breakfast at the house of Mr and Mrs Arthur Sassoon (the bride's brother-in-law and sister, and her nearest relations in England), where he gave the toast of the bride and bridegroom. (His own health was proposed afterwards by the Earl of Beaconsfield, old, tired, and dyed, at one of his last public appearances.)

Through Arthur and his wife, and as a consequence of this marriage, the Sassoons entered into the orbit, if not yet the circle, of the Heir to the Throne and arbiter of London society—a process which was (as we shall see) to prove of the greatest importance in the family history. Moreover, thus allied to the Rothschilds,<sup>1</sup> who for the last generation had cut a great figure in English public and social life, these new arrivals in England and to Europe enjoyed something of the same prestige and were at once “accepted”: a piece of good fortune envied even by such men as the superlatively wealthy Baron de Hirsch, who as late as the eighteen-nineties was reported to consider it the great bitterness of his life that the New Court plutocrats would not recognize him. Not, though, that there were no differences of opinion between the two Court factions: and more than once Cyril

<sup>1</sup> There was to be another and closer Sassoon-Rothschild alliance in 1887, when Albert—Abdullah's son—married a member of the Paris branch of the parallel family: see pp. 171-7.

Flower, later Lord Battersea, the Liberal politician and a son-in-law of the late Sir Anthony de Rothschild, had to exert all his tact in order to prevent a breach between his kinsmen and their Oriental counterparts.

Already before this notable wedding, and not long after his own marriage, Arthur Sassoon had made up his mind that the lot of a man of pleasure was preferable to that of a man of affairs and accorded better with his tastes. He retired from business (he had inherited sufficient for all reasonable and even unreasonable purposes), henceforth maintaining only a formal association with the family firm. (On the rare occasions when his assistance was called for, it was in connexion with its Chinese and Indian, but hardly ever its London, transactions.) Thereafter, he lived the life of a gentleman of ease: but an ease that though ornamental was neither useless nor ineffective. He was by far the best-known and most popular and most appreciated of his family in the outside world, and his private charities were said to be on a grand scale. The brother-in-law of Leopold de Rothschild, who twice won the Derby and once was rumoured to have abstained from winning it only out of loyalty, could hardly fail to show keen interest in racing; and Arthur Sassoon was to be seen at all the important meetings, as in duty bound, and was always one of the distinguished party entertained by his kinsman year by year at Palace Court, Newmarket, for the races. He was of scholarly tastes (for a man who was educated by a Chief Rabbi, who knew Hebrew, Hindustani and Arabic,

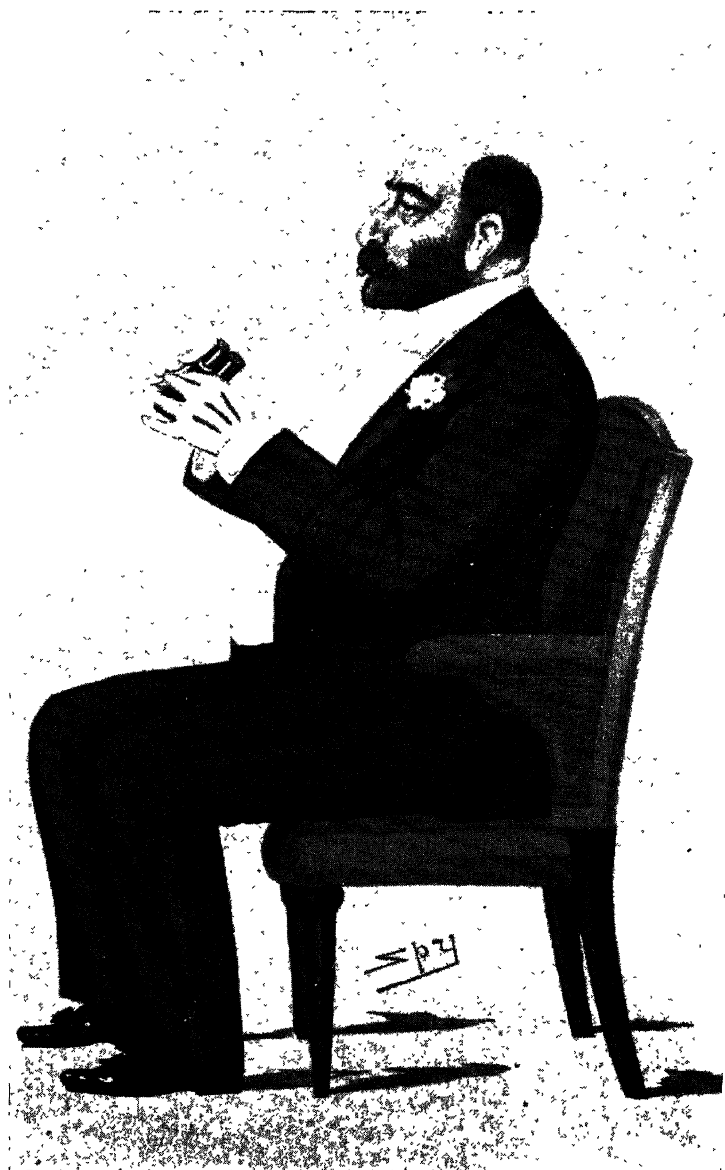
and who was given in his youth a perfect knowledge of the Bible in the original and an insight into Talmudic casuistics, this was inevitable). But later in life these became curiously transformed. He formed the deplorable habit of starting every day by reading *The Times* from beginning to end—and *The Times* of that period was indeed a heavy mouthful. But in the result he was particularly well informed, and was appealed to for information on all manner of curious by-ways of knowledge. It would hardly constitute an advantage in the Society of the reign of George VI, but at the close of that of Queen Victoria it was an asset not to be despised, especially as the Heir-Apparent resolutely refused to read the newspapers for himself.

But it was to his wife that he owed his social pre-eminence. She was a *grande dame* in a sense in which this could be said of none of her semi-Oriental sisters-in-law, and of few persons in England in the Edwardian era (a period that began of course long before Edward's accession to the throne). Her hospitality was famous, not so much for its luxury as for its perfection. Her position in Society was almost comparable on the one side with that held by the Duchess of Devonshire, and on the other with that of Mrs George Keppel. Her exceptional distinction lay in the fact not only that she could aspire to these divergent positions, but that she could hold them too. All the most prominent figures in English life and politics passed through her doors and were greeted with the same dignified charm. Even rival leaders of Society considered it a high compliment to be mistaken for her.



Hardly any account of London Society of the Edwardian or late Victorian era fails to mention her, with a matter-of-fact simplicity which, though the despair of the biographer, itself testifies to the reputation she enjoyed: no other hostess below the rank of Duchess probably figures anything like so often. A list of those persons who went to her luncheon- or dinner-parties in London or attended her balls is a directory of London politics and Society, and her name is seldom absent, with flattering qualifications, in the reminiscences of statesmen and society men of the time. Lord Rosebery, whose wife was a Rothschild, was on the most intimate terms with both Mrs Leopold and her sister, with a lifelong bond, and most of the other political leaders, on either side, followed his example. There was a piquant coincidence for example in 1904, when at a delicate juncture in politics, the old Duke of Devonshire went down to Brighton, to the very same house where the Prime Minister was staying, to be nursed at the beautiful hands of the same Society hostess—and to return suffering from a most violent cold.

Reuben Sassoon, who had arrived in England to assist in the family business in 1867, completed the family trilogy of celebrities, with his brothers, Albert and Arthur, so far as English Society was concerned. In most ways he was the most incongruous figure of all; for on the one hand he was not demonstratively Anglo-Indian, like the former, nor on the other did he have the English upbringing of the latter or enjoy the advantages of a wife who was a heaven-sent hostess in the grand manner. But



REUBEN SASSOON  
(*Caricature by "Spy"*)



when (as will be seen in the next chapter) he not only entered for some reason or the other into the circle of the Prince of Wales, but actually became one of his closest friends, Society could not avoid throwing open its doors to him or taking advantage of the fact that his were open to them. Henceforth, the Talmudical knowledge that he had acquired in his youth was diverted to other purposes. The dapper, dark-skinned, heavy-faced, bearded Oriental was to be discerned wherever the Heir-Apparent went. He became a devotee of the theatre, where he might regularly be seen (almost invariably in a box), wearing elaborate jewels which that age resented in male clothing less than the present one. He dabbled in the Turf, and had a few horses in the stable of Leopold de Rothschild (the best and most profitable of them was Theodore, a son of his kinsman's freak Derby winner, Sir Bevys). As became one of the Prince's circle, he was of course an impassioned bridge-player, and had a folding card-table specially made which always accompanied him as part of his luggage wherever he went. But he had the courage to retain, without any compromise, the Biblical name that his father had bestowed upon him, doubtless recalling the Rabbinic adage that he had learned in his youth, that the Children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt as a guerdon for their fidelity in not changing their names and transmogrifying, e.g., Reuben into a fashionable appellation such as Rufus. Once the original diffidence was passed, Society found him generous, charitable, kindly, and unostentatious and, unlike most of his rivals in the Marlborough House set, it

could be said of him that he did not have a single enemy.

Instead of concentrating themselves in one part of London, as the Rothschilds had done in "Rothschild Row" at the top of Piccadilly, facing the Park, the Sassoon brothers spread themselves out lavishly in all the most desirable parts of the metropolis. Sir Albert established himself in Kensington Gore, his house being according to contemporary opinion one of the most perfectly-appointed in London. (Perfectly appointed, *bien entendu*, in the spirit of the age. The dining-room had formed part of the Prince of Wales' pavilion at the Paris Exhibition of 1871; there were characteristic *ottocento* tapestries from the Royal Works at Windsor: above the fireplace was a tapestry portrait of Queen Victoria, and in an adjacent niche a d'Espinaz bust of the Princess of Wales.) Reuben progressed from Lancaster Gate, where he had set up his establishment on his arrival, to 1 Belgrave Square. This was a palatial mansion (now subdivided into two, each adequate for all normal purposes) noteworthy because at that time, by an ingenious but extremely complicated arrangement, the stables were situated at the top of the house, the horses and carriages being conveyed to them by lift! (He gave this up later for a less magnificent residence in Pall Mall.) Arthur settled in Albert Gate, opposite the mansion of Hudson, the very *nouveau-riche* railway magnate (now the French Embassy) and all but in Hyde Park, in a house said to have the finest music-room, and one of the finest staircases, in London. Other members of the

family—nephews, sisters-in-law, or brothers who were less prominent in Society—found themselves accommodation in subordinate positions, such as Knightsbridge, where Frederick (Farraj) David Sassoon, the youngest brother, had his house.

Apart from this fashionable metropolitan attachment, the brothers succumbed with one accord to the simpler attractions of the English coast, in what may be its most exhilarating but is hardly its most select resort. One after another, they purchased themselves houses in Brighton. Albert acquired an enormous mansion with vague Oriental associations both in its name and its history—1 Eastern Terrace, Kemp Town, which had formerly belonged to Samuel Laing, the great railway magnate, financier, and Liberal politician, who stood alternately at the head of Government departments and financial undertakings and had at one time been Financial Minister in India. Reuben and Arthur, always particularly close friends, were in the more attractive modern part towards Hove. The latter's residence was at 8 King's Gardens, a plain, white-painted corner house, facing the lawns and the sea. It appeared from the front a comparatively modest establishment. This was because the entire frontage was taken up by the porch and bay-windows of the enormous dining-room, in which a score of guests could be comfortably seated: the house went back far enough to give superabundant accommodation for a large party and as many as forty servants. The mansion has now been converted into flats, and it is said that the great dining-room is now a complete family residence in itself! A few doors along, at

7 Queen's Gardens, Reuben had a similar residence, outwardly as unpretentious and inwardly as roomy as the other, but generally painted a brilliant cobalt-blue. Other Sassoons, male and female, occupied other strategic points about the watering-place.

Arthur, taking the task of becoming an English Society leader more seriously than any other member of the family, was not content with London and Brighton and struck out boldly in a new direction—not only in a geographical sense. Born under British rule, and educated partly in England, he had acquired some of the tastes that do not come naturally to the Oriental Jew, and was passionately devoted to hunting. (For the most timid man brought up in the proximity of tigers, the milder quadrupeds of the British Isles offered, of course, no terror.) In the Highlands, on the Seafield Estate near Alvie, he acquired a shooting-box, Tulchan Lodge, Strathspey. It was a picturesque lodge, delightfully situated on the hillside, overhanging the banks of the Spey: and there every autumn he indulged in his favourite sport, being reckoned in his day among the great Highland deer-stalkers, almost on a level with the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, his near neighbour. (There was, in fact, no forest in Tulchan itself and no opportunity for stalking, though the grouse-shooting was considered particularly fine.) The shooting-parties he entertained here included some of the most notable figures in the country, from the Heir to the Throne and his son downwards. But it was characteristic that the guests' servants were not forgotten, each being allowed to take away a brace

of grouse and to dispatch a hare to his friends or family.

This was typical of the interest and kindness that earned the Sassoons, like the Rothschilds, much popularity among all classes, and which was as much hereditary in the house, in all its branches, as their fortunes. Sassoon benefactions, of one sort or another, were scattered over the country, from the Kentish coast as far north as Scotland. At Walton-on-Thames there was the Public Hall: at Brighton, the St. Anne's Wells Gardens: at the Middlesex Hospital, a high-frequency X-ray department, named after Mozelle Sassoon: an incidental scholarship at the City of London School to commemorate the first Jewish Honorary Freeman of the City: and here and there hospital beds, wards, prizes, and the rest of the apparatus of plutocratic philanthropy. They were Chairmen of Hospitals, appeal committees and charities; they took the chair with dignity on all necessary occasions, and repeated the customary platitudes with as much portentousness and as little originality as authentic descendants of the older nobility. It was not a question so much of the extent of their liberality (which after all is not too exacting an achievement for the rich) but also of the manner of it. It is told, for example, how one of the best-beloved of the female members of the clan, Mrs Flora Sassoon (donor of the gardens referred to above) passed a Hove policeman, on a very hot day, mopping his forehead, and observing that the temperature was high. She stopped.

"What you need is a melon," she said. "It's the



best thing to cool you on a warm day. Do you like melons?"

It was in the days before melons had become as common as they did subsequently, but the upholder of the peace indicated that he did.

"How many police are there in the force here?" asked the inquisitive Sassoon.

"Sixty-four," said the officer. And next day, sixty-four choice melons arrived at the local police-station, with his interlocutor's compliments.

So in these halcyon years, the name of the members of the Sassoon family was seldom out of the Society columns in the papers. Royalty was a guest at Tulchan Lodge. Mr Reuben Sassoon had dined at Marlborough House. There had been a great entertainment in honour of a visiting Oriental potentate at Sir Albert Sassoon's mansion in Kensington Gore. Mr and Mrs Arthur Sassoon had stayed at Sandringham or (a little later) at Windsor Castle. Mrs Meyer Sassoon<sup>1</sup> gave a dinner at Hamilton Place, with a marquess, an earl, two barons, and half a dozen lesser titles among the thirty guests. There was a musical party at Mrs Edward Sassoon's. A Ball at 2 Albert Gate was postponed owing to the death of the Duchess of Devonshire. Mrs Arthur Sassoon's house-party in Scotland to meet His Royal Highness included the Earl of Derby, Lord Herbert Vane-Tempest, Mrs Sneyd and others, and she was expecting a visit from the Earl of Rosebery. Lady Sassoon had returned from Paris and was about to proceed to

<sup>1</sup> These belonged to the third generation of the family: see Chapter VII.

join her husband in Scotland. . . . The memoirs of late Victorian and Edwardian times are filled with such references, without the slightest intermission, stretching over a period over something like a quarter of a century. They entertained, to use a current phrase, royalty and royalty: to extend it, with no less veracity, potently and potentates, nobly and the nobility; but never commonly, and commoners comparatively seldom.

Exotic visitors to England drifted naturally to the Sassoons, and at the beginning they enjoyed some reflected glory in consequence (later on, it was they who reflected it). Sometimes, it was a question of reviving old acquaintance. For example, when the picturesque Seyyia Bargash ibn Said, younger son of the Sultan of Muscat, was an exile in India for many years after his father's death, it was in the Sassoon family (who had business interests in his father's dominions) that he found not only sympathy, but also support, hospitality and comfort. Later on, when he succeeded to the southern part of his ancestral dominions, including the island of Zanzibar (unfortunately, it was that part with which Sassoon business dealings were least) he did not forget his old friends. In 1878, in connexion with his attempt to secure a British protectorate over the whole Sultanate (which, had it been successful, would have made it impossible for Lord Salisbury to barter Heligoland for Zanzibar and might have changed the face of history) he was in England, giving the London populace a succession of free entertainment. Here he renewed his Sassoon acquaintance. He was overjoyed to find old friends

who could speak to him in his native Arabic: and they entertained him splendidly, with dishes which both from the religious and culinary point of view met with his complete approval, both in London and in Brighton.

It was in 1889 that the magnificence of Sassoon hospitality reached its acme. It was the year not only of the Maybrick murder trial but also of the second state visit of the Shah of Persia, Nasr-ed-Din, to England. Recollecting the unfortunate experience of sixteen years before, when a number of members of the august visitor's suite had left without paying their bills, the City of London was somewhat backward in its hospitality, which had cost it on the previous occasion between £15,000 and £20,000. It was only on the earnest request of the Prince of Wales that its reluctance was at last overcome, but even so the civic reception seemed lacking somewhat in cordiality. It is possible that similar pressure was brought to bear on Sir Albert Sassoon, though in view of his great business interests in Persia and his Persian decorations it is probable that this was unnecessary. In any case, his entertainments proved to be among the most brilliant affairs of a brilliant summer. To the general relief, the manners of His Imperial Majesty had improved a little since 1873, when his interest in the proceedings arranged for his benefit was stimulated only at Madame Tussaud's and when he was meanfully staring at the ladies of the Court; and Sir Albert had the additional advantage of being able to speak to him in his own language. He showed him hospitality at his houses, both in London and Brighton (together,

with his suite, which included an urchin to whom he had given the rank of Field-Marshal for inadvertently saving his life), drove with him in semi-state when he visited Hove, and led a deputation of the Anglo-Jewish Association to wait upon him and present an address (the treatment of the Jews in Persia, in those days, was deplorable). The culmination was reached on July 4th, when he gave a gargantuan reception in his honour. The resources even of his enormous house would have been taxed to accommodate all those whom it was desired to invite, and the Empire Theatre was hired for the affair. The building was profusely decorated; there was a programme of choice ballets, the female performers in which were much appreciated by the guest of honour: the refreshments were lavish and exquisite: and the list of those present, including the entire world of fashion and politics, filled more than one column in the newspapers on the following day (it began with the Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince Albert Victor, Princess Louise, the Infanta Eulalie of Spain, the Duc d'Orléans, and the Earl of Fife). Nasr-ed-Din had been effectively entertained; Sir Albert Sassoon had definitely entered into Society.<sup>1</sup>

With the arrival of the second generation of Sassoons at nobiliary marks of distinction, the College of Heralds had been approached for assistance, and an elaborate coat-of-arms devised.

<sup>1</sup> The Shah's assassination in a Mosque at Teheran shortly after his return to Persia was probably regarded by the more pious of his subjects as a punishment for his association with the infidel. But it was more plausibly a result of his attending service, as the old agnostic so rarely entered a Mosque at all.

Oblivious of the Bee that had been the symbol of their reputed ancestors, the Princes of the Exile in ancient Baghdad<sup>1</sup> (a Napoleonic anticipation), a completely new medium was devised. In the official jargon:

*Or, a palm-tree eradicated, proper, between, on the dexter, a pomegranate, also proper, and on the sinister a branch of laurel fructed, vert, both proper; on the chief azure a lion passant of the first, in the dexter paw a rod erect, or.*

The crest consisted of

*On a mount vert, a fern brake surmounted by a dove volant, having in the beak a laurel-branch, all proper, the wing semé with estoiles, or.*

The motto, below, was in Latin, *Candide et constanter*. Above, there was the Hebrew equivalent, taken from the traditional liturgy, *Emeth ve Emunah*: though the Anglicized posterity of Sassoon David Sassoon, of Ashley Park (who had died before his brothers indulged in this extravagance) preferred to omit this public reminiscence of Semitic origin.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This was, according to legend, to commemorate the tact shown by the Exilarch Bustani, who, stung by a wasp when he was in the presence of the Caliph Omar, forbore to disturb his reverent posture in order to drive it away.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the only instance of Hebrew on the coat-of-arms of Anglo-Jewish families: that of the Montefiores, for example, embodies the word *Jerusalem*, though most families prefer for the purpose the language of Ovid to that of Isaiah. The practice of bearing a coat-of-arms, or an approximation to it, was usual among Jews even in medieval times, and they may often be seen on old signet rings and tombstones. The coat-of-arms of the family of the present Lord Roborough (Sir Henry Lopes, *recte* Lopez, *recte* Franco) embodies the fountain carved on the family benefactions in the beautiful old Leghorn Synagogue.

The mysteries of the symbolism can be penetrated without excessive effort or ingenuity. The Lion is clearly that of Judah, and the rod in his hand the Sceptre ("rod" in the original) that was never to depart from that tribe (Genesis xlix. 10)—a very obvious allusion to legendary Davidic origin and to the status of the Princes of the Captivity in Baghdad from whom the family claimed descent. The palm-tree below is that like which the righteous man flourisheth: the pomegranate is a Rabbinic symbol of repleteness in good deeds, and the laurel of concord: while the dove of peace benignly surveys the achievement from above, bearing its dividends in its beak.

Swallowed up in their Society\* activities, the Sassoon family did not play a very great part in the internal affairs of their co-religionists, notwithstanding their regular and in some cases munificent contributions to communal charities and institutions: and they never became a legend in the East End ghetto in the sense in which some other outstanding Anglo-Jewish families did. The reason for this was obvious. When they first settled in England, the majority section of the community, of German and Eastern European extraction, was already tyrannized over, in the most benevolent and open-handed fashion, by the Rothschilds, whose sway was not only unquestioned but also, at that time, unquestionable. In any case, the new arrivals, belonging as they did to the *Sephardi*, or Mediterranean and Oriental section, could hardly have challenged their place. In their own synagogue, indeed, they played as prominent a role as the

vested interests of the old Anglo-Jewish families (particularly, when they first arrived, the Montefiores) would permit. They were among the Elders of the congregation (the Manchester offshoot of which was opened by Sir Albert in 1873), and in the next generation one of them became its Warden. But they did not have the backing, and in most cases lacked the urge, to permit them to play a part of real importance in the wider community: and except in the Anglo-Jewish Association (in which their interest was obvious, in view of its benevolent, political, and above all, educational activities in the East) they were generally reckoned among the more blessed element who give money rather than receive office.

From time to time, the Society Sassoons would be slightly disconcerted by the arrival from India or the Far East of an untimely reminder of their past non-Society existence: a connexion or a relative—sometimes a close relative—who still carried on to the last degree, in his life, appearance, habits, and religious practices, the full heritage of the original David Sassoon; who could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered an Occidental—even an Occidental Jew: who spoke an English which was indubitably that of Bombay, if not of Baghdad: who attended synagogue at inconvenient times, and persisted in reciting a lengthy Grace after meals in inconvenient company: who refused to eat meat provided by a non-Jewish butcher or going on a journey on Saturday. For in every generation of the family, by the side of the Sassoons who played their role in London

Society, there were those who hung their harps determinedly on the willows of Babylon. The family-tree thus shows some incongruous juxtapositions.<sup>1</sup>

It would be quite wrong to imagine that there was any absence of dignity, or still less of culture, in these descendants of David Sassoon who adhered uncompromisingly to his spiritual heritage and conceptions. The reverse, indeed: and of all the Sassoon family in England the most majestic, not to say attractive, figure was one who kept the banner of Jewish tradition flying without apology or compromise. After the firm of David Sassoon had been made a Limited Company in 1901, Mrs Solomon (Flora) Sassoon, who as we have seen had managed the Indian interests of the firm for some ten years after her husband's death, found that life in India had lost something of its purpose. Accordingly, she followed the example of her various brothers-in-law and removed to England,

<sup>1</sup> Occasional remoter connexions and namesakes of the family came into the public eye from time to time. There was, for example, an Alfred Sassoon who published at Glasgow, in 1905, a volume of verse, *Llewellyn and Other Poems*, in which he showed the same tastes if not the same competence as his kinsman, Siegfried, was to do. He was a great-grandson of Saleh, brother of the original David Sassoon, his mother being a daughter of the latter's son, Elias.

It is less easy to trace the connexion with the family of a penurious Indian Jewess bearing the same surname who married a British soldier and begat a numerous progeny. On arriving in England, the husband became a proselyte to Judaism. Faithfully following the precepts of his new religion, he gave up a job at the Woolwich Ordnance Factory because he would not work on the Jewish Sabbath. Employment was found for him, with some difficulty, at a London Reformed Synagogue, but as he refused to put out the lights on the first Friday evening, on the grounds of being a Jew, he lost this post as well.



where she too set up her house in the heart of the West End. But it was a house unlike that of any other member of her family. Her interests and antecedents expressed themselves in three different circles. There was that of ordinary English society; that of the Indian visitors to London; that of Jews—not apologetic Western Jews, but full-blooded, hyper-orthodox Eastern Jews. All of these met in her house, where she maintained a *salon* in the style of a *Grande Dame* of the eighteenth century, but with a great deal more catholicity, entertaining aristocrats, rajahs and rabbis with equal success and confidence. She could speak to all in their own languages—changing from English to Arabic, and from Arabic to Marathi, and from Marathi to Hebrew, with complete ease and impartiality. That she was witty goes without saying—that quality is indispensable in a *Grande Dame*. But she also had that rarer gift, which made her so admirable a hostess—an unflinching sense of fun.

Many women are, or pretend to be, interested in scholars, but Flora Sassoon was a scholar herself, whose entertainment of rabbis was for the intellectual pleasure of their conversation rather than for the spiritual merit of pious association. She met them on their own chosen ground, exchanged Talmudic *novellae* with them, and when she was told anything that merited particular attention would send one of her retinue of Oriental Jewish servants for pencil and paper so that she could note it down. On one occasion she even presided at Prize Day at the Jews' College—the London Jewish Rabbinical Seminary—and enriched the proceedings

with a discourse such as few of her audience could have written, and not all of them understood. Her charities reflected her interests: and the poor scholar could be sure of finding in her sympathy as well as support, in the traditional manner of the ideal woman in Israel. Her son, named David Sassoon after his grandfather, could hardly fail to inherit her enthusiasm. Himself a scholar and writer of no mean distinction, he has built up one of the most magnificent collections of Hebrew manuscripts in private hands in the world to-day, including such superb specimens of Hebrew art as the Farhi Bible, written in Provence in the fourteenth century and purchased by the present owner in the course of a visit to Damascus.<sup>1</sup>

Above all, she loved good deeds. In the traditional Jewish scheme of life no deed could be more meritorious than that of starting a new home in Jewry. With her experience of China, India and England, her widespread family connexions, her astonishing knowledge of family history and pedigrees, she had every opportunity for exercising this passion to the fullest extent. Her greatest joy was to arrange a match between a young couple, adroitly brought together from far ends of the earth: and the house in the West End of London would resound to the hilarity and music of a Jewish wedding in the Oriental style, just as though it were in Baghdad or Rangoon.

<sup>1</sup> David Solomon Sassoon has described his manuscript collection in a superb catalogue, *Ohel David*, which demonstrates keen family pride as well as great scholarship, and makes the student look forward eagerly to the time when he will himself compile the record of his family against the background of the history of the Jews in the Orient, about which he knows more than any other living person.

She had, not only the tastes, but also the appearance of the *Grande Dame*. It was a paradoxical fate that gave her, perhaps the most vigorously Jewish of the Sassoon family after the first generation (for she was herself a Sassoon by blood as well as by marriage), an accidental appearance the lack of which somehow spoiled the illusion so expensively evolved by some of her Society kinswomen. To the close of her days she was not only stately, but positively beautiful. She had the sense of dress, often lacking in those who have the other senses so acutely developed. Her jewels, famous even in India, set off her costume instead of detracting from it by their magnificence: though it was said that they were graduated in wear in accordance with her esteem (not dictated by wealth or rank) of the guests whom she was going to entertain. She ruled over her drawing-room like an Empress over her court, and would summon specially favoured visitors from the remoter twilight to sit by her chair, for the honour and pleasure of more intimate conversation. To know her was in short not only a liberal but also at the same time a conservative education: and so far as the present writer is concerned, the privilege of her acquaintance over many years will always constitute a particularly treasured and happy memory.

Mrs Flora Sassoon died only in 1936, being with her sister-in-law, Mrs Arthur Sassoon, the last member of the second generation of the Sassoon family to be active in England, and surviving many of the best known members of the next generation. She thus belongs chronologically to a rather later

period than the majority of the members of the family spoken of in this chapter, whose activity lay in the period before the Great Divide of 1914.

It is necessary to round off the story of that earlier age, when what secured the position of the Sassoons in Society in the first instance was, more than any other single factor, their intimacy with the Heir to the Throne. It was a friendship in some ways as bizarre as it was striking: and it must be treated of in a chapter by itself.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ROYAL BOX

IN November 1875, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, landed at the Bombay dockyard to begin the first royal progress to India, with some £30,000 of presents to the local potentates (to be returned in kind, as was anticipated, in due course) in his baggage. It would have been an interesting trip for the high-spirited young man but for the dreary round of social formalities. The Princes and Rajahs were, of course, eminently picturesque and (at the beginning, at least) mildly diverting. But the worst ordeal was when he had to make himself pleasant to an interminable round of native business-men, not unlike their London counterparts except for their hue and the fact that their mastery of any sort of English was even more ludicrously imperfect.

There was one such function, not long after his arrival, when the host was one of the great Bombay commercial magnates, a certain Sir Albert Sassoon. There was to be the usual great luncheon at the latter's residence in the environs of the city, and afterwards the party was to adjourn to witness the casting of the statue which he had intimated his intention of presenting to the municipality—a fact that made the Prince's advisers consider this

preliminary compliment on his part to be necessary.

Probably to the Prince's surprise, certainly to his relief, this function turned out to be something very different to what he had expected and been accustomed to in these last days. The house, a magnificent place (or was it palace?) called Sans Souci, was comfortable even by European standards, if somewhat incongruous in the Indian setting. But above all his host ("A shrewd and pleasant specimen of the tolerant Anglicized Oriental," as a fashionable observer described him) was of a very different type from the ordinary Indian of the same social status. He spoke English—and half a dozen other languages as well, though, unfortunately, none of them was comprehensible to the European. He was travelled, having been in London a couple of years previously, when he received the Freedom of the City and had even been presented at Court. Several of his family were already established in England, and one or two had begun to make themselves known in Society (there was, for example, that lovely creature, Mrs Arthur Sassoon). But above all, he was an interesting companion and a good talker, with a well-stocked mind and a wide fund of information—precisely the type that His Royal Highness loved to frequent, saving himself thereby the bore of studying books and memoranda. He was, of course, a Jew, though not quite of the same type as the Prince's highly Occidentalized English friends, intimate with him already for some years, the Rothschild brothers. This was possibly responsible for his intellectual

range and alertness, which rendered him so different as a companion from the ordinary self-made business-man. In any case, religion and racial origin made no difference to the Prince. He valued men as he found them; and he found in Albert Sassoon a man whose acquaintance was worth the while.

The story goes that Edward so appreciated his unusually diverting time in the Sassoon house that he promised his host that, when he returned home, he would do anything that lay in his power to smooth the path of the other's younger brothers. Whether this is true or no, the acquaintance between the two men was renewed when, not long after, Sir Albert definitely transferred himself to England. It became deeper and less formal: and one of the most magnificent affairs held at the great mansion in Kensington Gore was a ball in 1880, at which the guest of honour was the Prince of Wales. In the following year (as has been told) the latter was present at Mr and Mrs Arthur Sassoon's house in a less conventional manner, at the wedding-breakfast of his friend, Leo Rothschild, and Maria Perugia, his hostess's sister. This was the first intimation to the general public of that close personal friendship with members of the Sassoon family, which was to develop more and more strongly in the succeeding years. The Royal enclosure had begun to be formed, and in it these Arab-Jewish-Anglo-Indian magnates were henceforth among the most prominent figures.

For the Prince was so magnificently free from prejudice that he seemed almost to have a positive

preference for Jewish society. "He has the same luxurious tastes as the Semites," wrote Lady Walpurga Paget, "the same love of pleasure and comfort." It may be questioned whether these are, in fact, Jewish characteristics, any more than they are of other men in the same stations of life. The sequence of royal intimacies with persons of this origin may more reasonably be ascribed to the sheer accident of the simultaneous presence in English society at this period of so many Jews of exceptional ability and force of character. But, whatever the cause, they were without question disproportionately prominent in his entourage.

There were not only men such as the Magnificent Rothschilds—Nathaniel (first Lord Rothschild and the first Anglo-Jewish peer), Alfred and Leopold, with their cousin and brother-in-law Ferdinand, whom Edward had known ever since his Cambridge days and who were<sup>1</sup> English gentlemen by upbringing and outlook—but others too of more recent arrival and fortune. (It may be mentioned, though, that none of the Jews in the circle disgraced it, like E. T. Hooley, who was actually entertained at Sandringham not long before his disastrous bankruptcy.) There were comparatively recent immigrants from the Continent, like Ernest Cassel, the financier who was so largely responsible for the regeneration of Egypt, and Baron de Hirsch, the multi-millionaire railway magnate and philanthropist, and some others. Moreover, Edward's art-expert, Charles

<sup>1</sup> Except for the last, Austrian born of Frankfort parents and English only by adoption—after a brief French experiment.



Davis, was a Jew; so was one of his physicians, Sir Felix Semon, the great laryngologist; and he used Sir George Lewis, of the famous firm of solicitors, which faithfully guarded all the secrets of the nobility, for legal advice. These men were not friendly with Edward in spite of being Jews or because they were Jews—the question of religion did not enter into his broad outlook. On the other hand, he thoroughly appreciated and even encouraged their loyalties. Hirsch's grandiose scheme, for solving the problem of the Jew by creating vast agricultural settlements in the Argentine, under the auspices of a Jewish Colonization Association (I.C.A.), on which he lavished in all some £10,000,000, is said to have been due in the first instance to Edward's specific encouragement. But he gave one even more striking illustration of his friendliness with the last-named. On one occasion, he refused an invitation to the castle of an anti-Semitic Hungarian baron because his Jewish companion was pointedly excluded from the invitation.

For the Sassoons as Jews to become members of the Prince's circle was not therefore surprising. It was highly surprising, though, that this should have been the case with them as Orientals (in this they stood alone) and that notwithstanding all they were able to progress from the relatively populous Royal Enclosure to the far more selective Royal Box, to which even in the most expansive days comparatively few persons were admitted. Sir Albert did not arrive quite to this distinction—he remained in the vestibule, like so many others. Reuben and Arthur, on the other hand, became

members of the Prince's small circle of closest intimates. They had been indescribably thrilled when they had first sent out those emblazoned cards of invitation bearing the coveted formula, "to have the honour of meeting Their Royal Highnesses, the Prince and Princess of Wales." But it was not long before they went further than this, and had the far greater distinction of being able to afford to omit this sonorous formality on ordinary occasions.

What did the Heir to the Throne of England look for in his friends? Not aristocratic birth or descent—they were qualities which, however admirable from afar, did nothing to improve the amenities of personal intercourse. They had of course to be wealthy, for unfortunately it is impossible to entertain royalty without wealth. He was an impassioned bridge-player, and it was necessary for them to be adepts at the game if they wished to maintain their intimacy. (In the country, he looked for a good shot as well, but since the eighteenth century that accomplishment had been supererogatory in Mayfair.) It was desirable that there should be attractive female society. But above all he demanded the qualities of an excellent raconteur and good, witty (though not intellectual) and well-informed conversation: conversation not about the feudal world that was passing but about the vivid, exciting world of affairs of the present day, that lay behind the formal chess-board of politics. He certainly did not plan it this way, but in fact his intimacies covered the world almost as efficiently as the diplomatic service. From the Rothschilds he

got all that he wanted to know about finance and the international interests that affected the City of London. Men like Sir Thomas Lipton and Sir Blundell Maple represented the old-established traditional English trading interests. And in the Sassoons he found a never-failing source of information about the affairs of India and the Far East, served up in an environment of unusual and highly pleasurable luxury. He used them almost as living blue-books.<sup>1</sup>

The friendship with Reuben Sassoon was the most surprising of all, for he was obviously the least congruous character in the entire Royal circle. Born in Bombay, brought up in a strict Arab-Jewish environment, long apprenticed to an unremitting grind in his father's counting-house, accustomed to speak only Arabic and to dress in Oriental clothing until he was well advanced in manhood, living permanently in England and under European conditions only from his thirty-third year, and lacking his brother Arthur's opportunities to acquire the social graces of the Occident, he was a strange companion for the Heir to the English Throne. Nor was there in the household the female element that so attracted Edward; for the diminutive Kate Ezekiel, Reuben's wife,<sup>2</sup> whom he had married in Hong Kong in 1860, was

<sup>1</sup> I have given an account of the Royal Enclosure, from a slightly different angle, in my book, *The Magnificent Rothschilds* (London, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> She was a daughter of the Baghdad Jewish family settled in Poona and Calcutta that had been the most important in India before the Sassoons came, her father being David Ezekiel of the latter city.

bewildered in the midst of her husband's magnificence, and had none of the tastes or qualifications of the Society hostess.

But it was inevitable, in view of the family intimacy and the Rothschild connexion, that Reuben Sassoon came into contact, like his brothers, with the future King. The latter found in him a faculty in which he was himself distressingly deficient. Reuben, apprenticed to business in his 'teens, had a gift for mathematical computation that the Prince considered extraordinary. It was to his mind a token of nothing less than financial genius. Gradually, he came to rely implicitly on the dapper Oriental for the monetary calculations of the type that entered most intimately into his daily life. Ultimately, the other became, as it were, the Keeper of his Privy Purse for Turf Purposes (as contemporaries euphemistically put it, "the administrator of funds for his pastimes").

Long after this, when Edward had already been on the Throne for a couple of years, the conversation turned at a luncheon at Hampden House on Cabinet-making—a subject which seemed likely to be very much in the air before very long, in view of the somewhat irresponsible activities in which Joseph Chamberlain was indulging. The Duke of Abercorn, who was present, jocularly attempted to sketch out the composition of a government that the King would find ideal. Lord Esher, of course, the power behind the scenes, would be the obvious Prime Minister. A prominent position, as one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, must be found for Lord Knollys, his Groom-in-Waiting

and familiar friend. And Chancellor of the Exchequer? There was a manifest selection—the King's confidant and adviser in monetary matters, Reuben Sassoon. But as a matter of fact, the choice would not have been by any means ideal, and Edward's confidence was based to a large extent on non-existent qualifications; for the gentleman in question had never played a really prominent role in business, was something of an expert only in Eastern affairs, and as we have seen, had long since given up all but the most formal activity in the city.

Rumour said that Edward found Reuben Sassoon financially useful in a more immediate fashion, and that this was the reason for the intimacy between them. But the suggestion is preposterous. In the first place, the Sassoons, though wealthy, were not enormously so. We will go into this point later; but it is enough to say here that none of the brothers but Albert was probably worth much more than half a million pounds, which though sufficient for extremely luxurious living is hardly enough to subsidize Royalty over a long period. In the second place, it was clearly quite unnecessary for the Heir to the English Throne to admit to the closest friendship every one of the many candidates to be his treasurer (their name was legion, and applications arrived by almost every post). A less sensational explanation must be looked for, and the simplest one is probably the truest. Edward was after all a connoisseur in character, as he was in cigars: and the fact that he appreciated Reuben Sassoon's company so highly is itself sufficient testimony that the latter must have had far more in him than met

the public eye. (Indeed, that he had a good deal to offer in the direction of intellectual companionship is obvious when one recalls that Arthur James Balfour—intimate with all branches of the family, in three generations—sometimes went down to Brighton to stay with him, and did so within a couple of weeks of his death.) On the other hand, the present writer, who has done his best to study all the contemporary accounts and impressions, must record that, to his regret, he has been quite unable to discover precisely in what his indubitable qualifications, social and personal, lay. Of course, he was a good bridge-player. But, though that was one of Edward's requirements in a companion it was not in itself sufficient; nor could the incomprehensible Arab-Jewish witticisms of the Orient compete for his approval with the robust German-Jewish stock-exchange jokes that the Rothschilds collected for him so assiduously and so expensively (sometimes, even by cable). Reuben Sassoon's remarkably well-stored mind, enriched with the experiences of two continents and many countries, and far wider if not necessarily deeper than that of the average member of the Marlborough House circle, was probably the pre-eminent attraction.

Naturally there was the best of fare, of wines, and of cigars as well. The cuisine at the houses at which he permitted himself to be entertained was not perhaps the primary consideration with Edward, but it was certainly not one that he overlooked. In this respect the Sassoons had progressed far since their Iraqui-Indian days. But that older world could be recalled into being when it seemed

requisite, to redress the culinary balance of the New. At table, the resources of the French chefs were reinforced when royalty was expected by the recondite delicacies that appealed to the jaded palates of the East. Rare Indian fruits, at that time quite unknown in Europe, were specially brought over. There was one occasion (was it at Reuben's house or at that of one of his brothers?) when, tasting mangoes and finding them extremely good, Edward allowed himself to be persuaded to have the residue deposited in his carriage before he drove home. Students of social history may be well advised to devote their attention one day to the lucullan treasures dispersed in the Edwardian era at Christie's. When Reuben Sassoon died, his choice collection of cigars was auctioned there, including some 1,200 Villar y Villar, Invencibles, 800 La Rosa Aromatica, Ne Plus Ultra, and 700 Flor de Cuba, Salamones. It is perhaps legitimate to see in this the narcotic taste that most appealed to His Majesty the King. And, when in 1895, R. D. Sassoon, Esq., of 1 Belgrave Square, disposed by the same means before his removal to Pall Mall of 50 dozen golden sherry, of the 1826 vintage, and 47 dozen Château Leoville Barton, '77, is it too much to imagine that these were vintages that did not particularly please the royal palate?

It was before his accession to the Throne that Edward's intimacy with Reuben was at its height. In the visitors' book at Sandringham, the latter's name figured more frequently than that of almost any other person, with the exception of the Marquess of Hartington (later Duke of Devonshire),

Lord Alington, and the Duke of Fife, who, as the monarch's brother-in-law, had the right to expect hospitality. When Reuben's daughter married, the Prince of Wales was among the guests at the wedding-breakfast in the great conservatory of his friend's house. In London, in Brighton, and in the country, they were constant companions. When Reuben gave up his great house in Belgrave Square, he moved to 14 Pall Mall. He called it a simple *pied à terre*, but it was significantly close to Marlborough House. They travelled sometimes on the Continent together. When in 1890 this usual companion was absent at the time of the Prince's annual visit to Homburg, the fact attracted some comment. There was one occasion, at this or some other German watering-place, when Edward played a practical joke on him, embarrassingly slipping an expensive *objet d'art* into his pocket when they were together in a jeweller's shop.

This sort of conduct could not be reciprocated with impunity. The Prince did not object to a certain degree of familiarity—sometimes, indeed, he tolerated it to an extraordinary extent. But it was he who gave the cue, and he strongly objected to any spontaneous outburst on the part of his companions, which he considered impertinence. On one occasion, while going downstairs together after dinner, Reuben Sassoon put his arm playfully round his neck. The Prince, suddenly offended, pushed him away with such violence that he fell and badly bruised himself. This mishap probably rendered it easier for the momentary bad feeling to be smoothed over; and none of the Sassoons was



ever guilty of such a breach of good taste as another unfortunate member of the Marlborough House circle who disgraced himself when playing billiards with the Prince by ejaculating: "Wales, pull yourself together." This evoked the classic example of the *retort oblique*: turning to a servant, the Prince quietly observed: "Call Mr ——'s carriage."

Of course, King Edward's friend belonged to the same clubs as he and his circle—the Carlton, Marlborough, Turf, Bachelors and Beefsteak; not a bad role for one who was characterized in his youth as "pious and learned," and had been brought up on an intimate study of Jewish theology and casuistics!

Arthur Sassoon, on the other hand, appealed to another side of Edward's character—a simpler aspect, delighting in conventional pastimes and open-air sports. The intimacy was heightened by his admiration for the beautiful Mrs Arthur Sassoon, and the intellectual gifts that rendered her one of the great hostesses of the age: for she and her sister, Mrs Leopold de Rothschild, continued to the very end to be among Edward's prime favourites. However it began, it became in the end a very simple, human association, unaccompanied by any pushing for place or title on the part of the subject, or by any condescension on that of the monarch. Twice before his accession to the Throne, and several times after, Edward stayed with them at Tulchan, until this became a regular autumn function each year in the week after the Doncaster meeting. (It was on one of these occasions that Sir Arthur Davidson, who was in attendance on the

King, received some shot in the face: that the King was responsible was never alleged, but no alternative suggestion was ever put forward.) The Royal bag there, one day, consisted of one hundred grouse, much to his delight. Thence, he would drive for visits to other friends, of older (and younger) lineage, in the neighbourhood—at Cawdor, Cullen, Gordon Castle or Castle Grant: but there was no commoner with whom the King was on terms so intimate as with the friend whose father had been born a subject of the Sultan of Turkey, not of the English Crown.

There were other regular annual encounters. At Newmarket, when they were the guests of the Leopold de Rothschilds, they were regularly to be seen in the Royal party ("Arthur Sassoon, the Jew page-boy, who gets up after each course to make bets for the King and others," a foreign visitor spitefully wrote of him). As the years passed on, the intimacy constantly grew deeper. Edward went shopping with Mrs Sassoon at Brighton, and husband and wife were to be seen constantly in the King's company. He would walk about arm-in-arm with him as with a younger brother. In speaking and writing, he was "Dear Arthur" to the King. "Come in here, Arthur," he called to him from his car, one day when they were shooting together at Castle Grant. "You and I are getting on in years, and must take things easily."

Shortly after Edward's accession to the Throne, an extraordinary rumour ran round London Society. It was said that, like Prince Hal five hundred years before, the King was intending to

keep different company from that which the Prince had frequented; and those exotic intruders, the Sassoons, above all, were to be dropped. The only justification for this report was in the fact that the new King had run down to Brighton for a few hours, without dropping in on any member of the clan, as he usually did. But it was pure coincidence—the sort of coincidence to which ordinary flesh, too, is subject. In fact, the friendship was perhaps greater after Edward's accession, strengthened now as it was by an entire generation of intercourse. It was no longer the association of full-blooded men in the height of their activity, based upon an identity of interests and pursuits, but rather the quiet, proved intimacy of well-trying companions who had begun to descend in the vale of years. Reuben's health indeed prevented him from being as constant a companion as heretofore. But this was compensated for by the growing intimacy in Arthur's house, where the King found himself able to relax better perhaps than anywhere else because of the very simplicity of his host's surroundings and background. (Generally speaking, the professional hosts of the old order went into eclipse after Edward's accession.) It was now that the shooting-parties at Tulchan and the periodical visits to Brighton became an institution: and the Arthur Sassoons were among the comparatively few members of the former Marlborough House set to receive invitations to the Coronation ceremony in 1902.

At this time, too, Edward went out of his way to bestow on his old friends a public testimony of his

high personal regard for them. In the Coronation Honours, both Reuben and Arthur Sassoon (like the Rothschild brothers) were made members of the Royal Victorian Order, founded in the old Queen's last years. But Arthur Sassoon was by now by far the more prominent of the two and the closest to the King: for in the new reign, as has been seen, Reuben was far less in the public eye than before, and he died in 1905 before it was half over.

The Sassoons were largely responsible for the renewal by Edward, not inappositely, of the Royal connection with Brighton, obscured since the days of George IV. He had indeed been sent there three or four times as an infant, and had run down from London for a few hours for a volunteer review in 1865. But after his accession he paid a regular series of winter visits for the sake of his health. On the first occasion, he dutifully stayed with the Duke and Duchess of Fife in Sussex Square. This was more or less unavoidable, for the Duchess was his sister, but he escaped every evening to dine with the Arthur Sassoons. On future occasions it was invariably as their guest that he went there, to stay in their plain white-painted villa in King's Gardens facing the sea and the lawns. Time after time a visit to Brighton would be sandwiched in between inland intervals of relaxation, with Lord Carrington at Daws Hill or the Harcourts at Nuneham. (As one reads these accounts, one cannot help thinking of the difference between the tranquil lot of royalty then and its strenuous existence to-day.) There was nothing royal in these simple

visits, which did a great deal to bring down the monarchy to the eye-level of the man on the Brighton promenade, who was after all the man in the street on holiday. On one occasion, the *To Let* notices of the house next door were taken down only a day or two before the royal arrival, but they remained conspicuously displayed a few doors away. The King would go out each day for his stroll along the lawns or the front, arm-in-arm with his host; and the aroma of his cigar would be snuffed up by his admiring subjects. Cake shops in the town would proudly display letters of commendation from Mrs Sassoon, indicating how His Majesty had enjoyed their products; and the chef would be overwhelmed by Royal compliments on the occasion of some special effort. Perhaps the culmination of the liberal era, the era of Jewish emancipation, was when Edward VII first crossed the threshold as King of that simple house at Brighton where he was the guest of a Jew of Oriental birth, faithful to the religion and heritage of his fathers.

Sometimes, the simple round would be varied by a drive out to Worthing to sit in the grounds of the house of pretty Lady Loder, or else a visit would be paid to one of the other members of the Sassoon clan, or perhaps to the Duke and Duchess of Fife at their residence at the other end of the watering-place. The King became more and more attached in his last years to these simple visits. He went to King's Gardens at the end of 1908 to recuperate on his recovery from his illness. He returned in 1909. He was there again in January 1910, in the middle of the turmoil of a General Election, after a visit to

Lord Iveagh's house at Elveden, and a short stay at Buckingham Palace. In February of that year he once more left Windsor for the tonic of the sea-air and the unassuming company on the coast; and it was at the Sassoons' house that he was visited by the Prime Minister, Mr Asquith, on the twelfth of the month, for an official audience to discuss questions connected with the opening of Parliament, the Speech from the Throne, and the vacancy in the Government caused by the resignation of Lord O'Hagan, one of the Lords-in-Waiting. It was not long after this that he left for his usual Spring visit to Biarritz, from which he returned, at the end of April, only to die.

The town had every reason to be grateful to the sovereign for his choice of seaside resort. After his three visits in twelve months, in 1908-9, it experienced a miniature boom. At Easter, there were record railway and hotel returns: the piers had a greater number of visitors than had been the case for some years past; the Railway Company was able to increase its dividends; and the August holidays brought the biggest crowds ever seen at Brighton, who spent a good deal of their time staring at the mansion where their monarch had stayed with his semi-Oriental plutocrat friends.

In order to commemorate this close association of Edward VII with Brighton, the grateful municipality decided to re-name the eastern extension of the town, where he was an occasional guest in the houses of the Duke of Fife and Sir Albert Sassoon, "King's Cliff." The name exists however only on

paper: for the Brightonians, with typical conservatism, insisted on retaining the old title, Kemp Town, thus perpetuating the name of the grand-scale speculating builder and religious revivalist who laid out the area, in preference to that of the Uncle of Europe.

On their first arrival in England, the Sassoon brothers had maintained the same sort of life that they had led in India. In moments of relaxation, they preserved even vestiges of their Oriental clothing; their cuisine was unmistakably and odorously Oriental; and strange smells issued from their houses, alleged by the vulgar to be caused by the burning of joss-sticks. From the Jewish point of view, too, their lives were unexceptionable. It was not only that they supported Jewish charities, as a matter of course, assumed offices in Jewish institutions, and attended synagogue when they were expected to do so. Their fidelity to tradition went down a good deal deeper than this. At their offices in Leadenhall Street, the *Mezuzah* prescribed by tradition (a parchment containing Biblical passages which emphasized the Divine providence) was affixed to the doorposts, and the business was religiously closed on Saturdays. Reuben had a superb collection of Jewish ritual art, most of which had been brought together by Philip Salomons, a brother of the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London. More than this: following the practice of his family in India, he had his own exquisitely-appointed synagogue in his house; and there, in the heart of fashionable London, the household assembled on Monday and Thursday mornings at least to conduct

divine service with the prescribed quorum of ten persons.<sup>1</sup>

This style of life could not long persist in members of the Marlborough House set. It was difficult for even the most devoted of traditionalists to be scrupulous about the dietetic observances when he was invited to dine with the Heir Apparent to the Throne of England, or to refuse to serve milk with the after-dinner coffee when he entertained the nobility, or to abstain from travelling on the Sabbath when an august companion desired to set out on a journey on that day. Not, however, that this implied any weakening of Jewish consciousness or loyalties. The brothers retained honorary office in Jewish organizations, continued to support Jewish charities, maintained their pews in the family place of worship, and filled the Brighton synagogue in particular with their benefactions, so that a stranger who peruses the votive tablets in the vestibule might imagine that they were the tutelary spirit of that shrine. Moreover, no social consideration deterred them from at least the major Jewish observances. When on one occasion, King Edward was staying with Arthur in Scotland over the Day of Atonement (when tradition prescribes a day of prayer, accompanied by complete abstinence from food) the host nevertheless observed the occasion in all its austerity; and the King sent to him at intervals during the day to inquire how he was supporting the fast. The slight embarrassment

<sup>1</sup> There is still extant the formal authorization that he received from the Secretary of his Synagogue authorizing this private prayer-meeting.



caused was not repeated, as on the next occasion when a royal visit to Tulchan coincided with this same observance, Edward tactfully absented himself from the house for the entire day, visiting one or other of his many friends in the neighbourhood, so that his host's devotions should not be distracted. Royal courtesy could not have been demonstrated more strikingly than in this display of consideration for a subject's religious scruples—so different from conditions in foreign courts, the passport to which could only be acquired at the price of baptism.<sup>1</sup>

Edward's intimacy with the Sassoons was maintained to some extent by his heir, George V, who also visited their houses before and after his

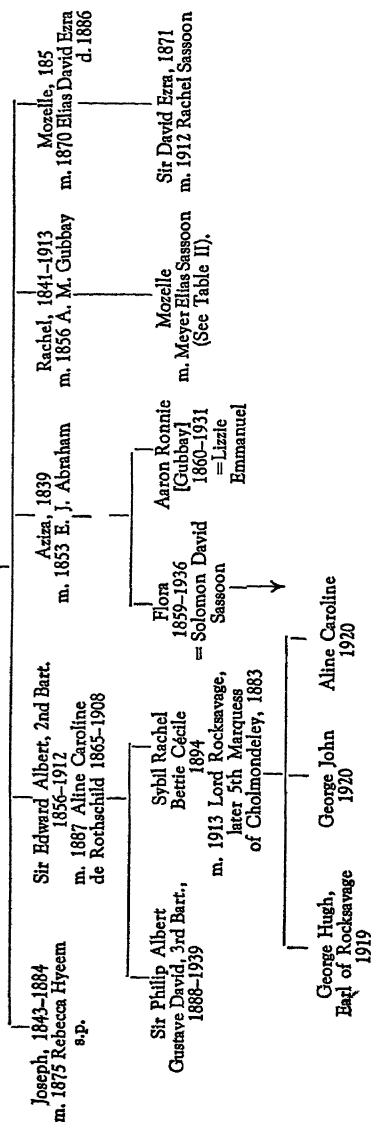
<sup>1</sup> Two contrasting examples from overseas may be cited. When about 1905 the Synagogue in the Fasanenstrasse in Berlin was built (it was to be burned down with the other Berlin synagogues in that marvellously regimented outburst of "spontaneous" feeling of November 1938), part of it was overlaid with tiles from the Imperial Factory at Rominten. The Kaiser, a good business-man, determined to inspect his products *in situ*, and deliberately (or so it seemed) outraged Jewish sentiment by taking off his helmet in the sacred building and thus making it necessary for others to do the same. But his South African correspondent, Paul Kruger, outdid him. In 1892, when the New Synagogue was built in Johannesburg, he consented to perform the opening ceremony, and was persuaded with a little difficulty to refrain from saying anything that would be offensive to the Jewish ear. At the Synagogue, he was coaxed into keeping his head covered, and everything passed off satisfactorily. But he had made no undertaking regarding the subsequent banquet and before it started gleefully seized the opportunity of pronouncing a Christological grace: "Praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ for what we are about to receive." The Jewish minister present, with admirable presence of mind, saved the situation. Rising, he said: "Grace having been pronounced by the President on behalf of the Christian gentlemen present, I will now recite it according to the Jewish form for the hosts."

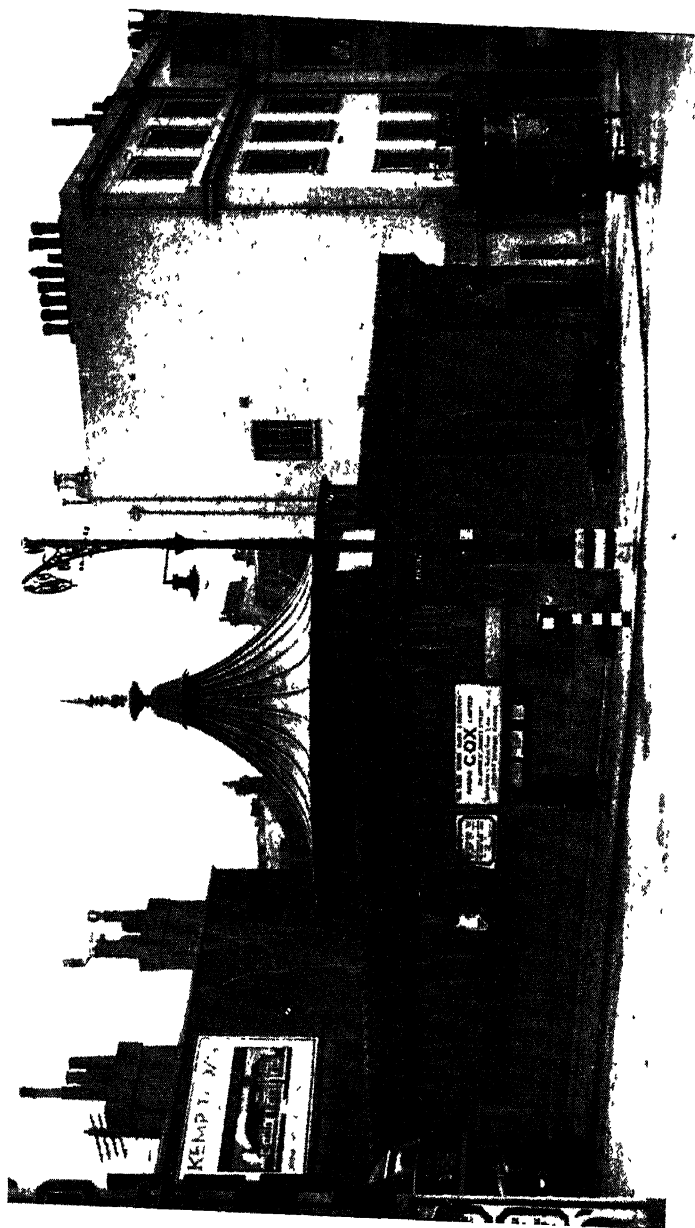
accession, was entertained at Tulchan, and even extended them his own hospitality at Sandringham and Windsor. But by now a generation intervened between them, and there could no longer be quite the same spontaneous intimacy as before between subject and ruler. That was not to be renewed until a later date, when, in a more troubled age, King Edward's grandson and namesake was to enter into a close personal friendship with a grandson of the eldest of the Sassoon brothers.

## SIR ALBERT SASOON AND HIS FAMILY

DAVID SASOON

SIR ALBERT ABDULLAH, 1818-1896  
(1st Bart., of Kensington Gore, cr. 1890)  
m. 1838 Hannah Moise, d. 1895





THE SASSOON MAUSOLEUM, BRIGHTON



## CHAPTER VII

## THE THIRD GENERATION

ON October 24th, 1896, Sir Albert Abdullah Sassoon, First Baronet, of Kensington Gore and Eastern Terrace, Brighton, then in his eightieth year, died at his seaside residence as the result of a sudden seizure. (His younger brothers, Sassoon, Elias, and Solomon, had predeceased him, in that order, in 1867, 1880, and 1894, respectively.) He was buried, in accordance with the rites of the Jews following the Spanish and Portuguese tradition, in a magnificent domed mausoleum, gaudy with marble and arabesques, which he had constructed not long since in proximity to his house. The reason for this slightly gruesome performance was not easy to comprehend. Possibly, it was simply in imitation of the mausoleum at Poona where the Baronet's father lay buried: sentimentalists suggested that he simply wished to remain near his dear ones after death; but cynics alleged that a feeling of superiority over other men, which extended beyond death, was mainly responsible, and that a similar Sassoon enclosure was anticipated in Heaven. But, in any case, the more immediate objects were defeated, as thirty-seven years later the remains were removed and re-interred in London. The mausoleum itself, said to have cost £6,000, is

now used as a decorator's storehouse, the mansion itself being an hotel. The episode does not quite accord with the sense of propriety of poorer families.

The two other brothers who were best known to English society survived the eldest of the family by some years. Reuben, crippled with gout, and for that reason less active and prominent after Edward's accession to the Throne than he had been, died on March 7th, 1905. His unassuming neighbour and brother, Aaron, who had fixed his home at Hove, the least conspicuous of the entire family, followed him to the grave two years later. The latter's will, a notable document, was his monument, nobler by far than his brothers' intimacy with princes: he left his entire fortune (with the exception of some life annuities) in trust "to be applied for the benefit of the poor in any country, kingdom, or principality in which the firm of David Sassoon & Company, their predecessors, successors or assigns, shall now be carrying on business."

Arthur had been King Edward's host at Brighton only a week or so before his royal friend's death in 1910, which shook him profoundly. In March 1912 he passed away at the house of his brother-in-law, Leopold de Rothschild, at Ascott, Wing, Leighton Buzzard. On the following day, King George sent for Leopold and requested him to express his condolences to the family; and at the funeral his equerry, Sir Lionel Cust, placed on the coffin a wreath of lilies of the valley: "*As a token of friendship and in remembrance of many happy days spent at Tulchan.—George R. and I.*"

The only survivor of the eight brothers was now the youngest of all, Farraj Hayim (known in England as Frederick), who lived another five years. Like his other brothers, he too had spent many years in China administering the family affairs, and had at one time been a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. From 1912 he was chairman of David Sassoon & Company, Limited, in succession to his nephew Edward (Sir Albert's son and heir).<sup>1</sup> With his death, in May 1917, in his sixty-fifth year, there passed the last of the remarkable brood of sons who had assisted to make the Sassoon family famous. Some of the daughters still survived, both in India and in England. The youngest, Mrs J. M. (Mozelle) Hyeem, is still living at the family Nirvana, Brighton, having been a widow for half a century; her life and her father's span a period of all but one hundred and fifty years!<sup>2</sup>

The third generation of the family and their children were now to the fore. It is impossible here to follow them into all their ramifications, especially in the female line. None of David Sassoon's children quite rivalled his philoprogenitiveness. However, his second daughter, Amam, who married Mayer Moses, had seven sons and three daughters, and his son, Elias, had (as we have seen) six sons and three daughters. The present writer refuses to endanger his sanity or that of his readers by attempting to follow all of them in all the labyrinthine convolutions of their marriages and offspring.

<sup>1</sup> See page 184-5.

<sup>2</sup> This is as yet far from a record. The Duke of Connaught, who is still alive, had as his godfather a man born in 1769—The Duke of Wellington.



One point may, however, be accentuated. The Sassoons cannot be said to have followed the example of the Rothschilds, who for a long time married to a perilous extent only in their own family, with the result that the second Lord Rothschild (for example) had four Rothschild grandparents and a correspondingly inequitable deficiency of great-grandparents. But there was, nevertheless, a very great degree of intermarriage in the family. The process was indeed less noticeable among the Sassoons by reason of the fact that, by coincidence, the marriage between cousins of the same name happens to have been less frequent. It was perhaps less notable, because it did not result in quite the same concentration of ability in certain directions (artistic taste and interest rather than, or as well as, financial acumen) that distinguished the parallel clan. But the tendency was unmistakable. Most of the sons of David Sassoon—five, that is, out of the seven who married—found their wives in the families of wealthy Baghdadi Jews settled in India—the same class to which they themselves belonged, and with which they were already allied by such frequent intermarriages in their Mesopotamian past: and one of them achieved the almost incredible feat of espousing his own great-niece, the granddaughter of his eldest brother.<sup>1</sup> Their children followed this example, marrying to a large extent in the same small circle, while their grandchildren, in many cases, chose as their life-partners their own

<sup>1</sup> The marriage of uncle and niece is of course permissible according to the Mosaic law, and the remoter alliance *a fortiori*.

cousins, descendants like themselves of David Sassoon and often members or associates of the firm. Thus, at least one child of each of Albert-Abdullah Sassoon's three daughters married a member of his family. The eldest, Aziza Abraham, was the mother of Flora, who married her kinsman, Solomon Sassoon. The second, Rachel Gubbay, was the mother of Mozelle (a mildly onological, or perhaps geographical, approximation to the Hebrew name of good augury, *Mazal Tob*), who became Mrs Meyer Sassoon. The third, another Mozelle, married Elias David Ezra: and their son, Sir David Ezra, of Calcutta, the noted ornithologist (Sheriff of Calcutta in 1925-6), married a daughter of Solomon Sassoon, who was a Sassoon too on her mother's side.<sup>1</sup> Thus, all the Jewish aristocracy of India—the Davids, the Ezras, and so on, with their half-dozen knighthoods and baronetcies—without exception count David Sassoon among their forebears, generally in more lines of descent than one. The intermarriages with some specific families are bewildering in their constant reiteration, generation after generation. As we have seen, David Sassoon's mother was a Gubbay; two of his sons married Gubbays; a plurality of his grandchildren (including daughters of both Albert and Reuben) married Gubbays; and to disentangle their posterity satisfactorily would be of benefit only to the psychiatrists.

<sup>1</sup> The founder of this family was another David Ezra, the earliest Jewish settler in Calcutta. His descendants include also Sir Alwyn Ezra (son of Joseph Elias Ezra), who is prominent in Indian public life and philanthropy: and Alfred Ezra, a munificent benefactor of the Zoological Gardens in London (the latter's wife is Muriel Helene Sassoon).

On the other hand, this inbreeding stopped to a great extent with the anglicized branches of the family, as the following partial table of marriages, generation by generation, indicates:

TABLE OF SASSOON INTERMARRIAGES

2nd Generation	3rd Generation	4th Generation
Moise	Rothschild	Cholmondeley
Gubbay	Raphael	Fitzgerald
Reuben	Boyle	Weisweiler
Ezekiel	Gunzburg	Rosenberg
Perugia	Beer	Folchi-Vici
Raphael	Thornycroft	Humphreys-Owen
Abraham (Gubbay)	Hyeem	Franklin (2)
Moses	Abraham	Meyer
Shellim	Ezra	Chaning
Hyeem	Gubbay	
	Simon	
	Levy	
	David	
	Sassoon	

The growing occidentalization, and thereafter what is now absurdly termed "aryanization," of the names is very noteworthy.

The outstanding member of the family in England in the third generation was Sir Albert Sassoon's only surviving son, and heir, Edward Albert, born when an Albert Edward was heir to the Throne of England and named after him with the surge of patriotic feeling natural in a Bombay merchant.<sup>1</sup> (The reversal of order of the two names was not so mysterious as might appear: the "Albert" was in this case the father's name, appended as was still usual in the Sassoon family to the son's.) He was born in Bombay in 1856, and his early years were passed in the manner that might have

<sup>1</sup> His elder brother, Joseph Albert Sassoon, born in 1853, married Rebecca Hyeem, of Calcutta, in 1875, but died shortly after without issue. It is interesting to speculate how the career of his nephew, Philip, would have been changed, had he survived to inherit the family title and fortune.

been expected in a member of the family. (His greatest thrill was when, in his twentieth year, he took his father's place as one of the official deputation that welcomed the Prince of Wales on his landing at the Dockyard in 1875.) He was a young man when his father transferred himself to England, and studied, not at one of the older universities, but with perhaps greater effect though less social prestige at the University of London, where he graduated. He spent two years, not unfruitfully, in the family business in China, laying up a store of useful experience, and of course over a considerable period paid long and repeated visits to India, where he was not permitted to idle. Thereafter, there was a conventional round—a commission in the Duke of Cambridge's Yeomanry Hussars, office in the usual circuit of communal charities and institutions, and naturally work at the counting-house of David Sassoon & Company in Leadenhall Street, where he became a partner (the only one of his generation to do so) before his father's death.

He was in his thirty-first year before he took himself a wife, but had no reason to regret his long wait. For the match captivated the public imagination. It was the union of two of the greatest fortunes in the Western hemisphere, of two of the most famous families in contemporary Jewish life, of the typical plutocrats of the east with the typical plutocrats of the west. The bride was, in fact, the brilliant, beautiful, gifted Aline Caroline de Rothschild, daughter of Baron Gustave de Rothschild, one of the heads of the Paris house, who was all but unique among it in that he had not

married one of his cousins (her mother was Cécilie Anspach, called Gustava by her friends, one of the greatest beauties of the Second Empire, as renowned for her wit as for her magnificence). The marriage took place in Paris in October 1887. Half of Paris society, from the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres and the Prince Czartoryski downwards, were present. The contract had been signed on the previous day at the Rothschild hotel in the Avenue Marigny, the streets adjacent to which were blocked by long lines of equipages. The religious ceremony, presided over by the Grand Rabbi of France, took place in the stately synagogue in the Rue de la Victoire, crowded to the point of suffocation. The flowers, the singing, the jewels, the presents, the oratory, the titles, the aroma of wealth, took away the breath of plebeian spectators. "I have just left," reported a professional observer, "completely overpowered by the magnificence of the fête."

This marriage introduced a completely new strain into the Sassoon family and the Sassoon record. Whatever admirers might have said about the older generation—its commercial ability, its integrity, and its benevolence—it would have been difficult to compliment it with any degree of truth upon its taste—at all events, from the Occidental angle. This seems indeed to have been dictated more by patriotic than by aesthetic considerations, if one is to judge from the royal portraits in various media which constituted the most prominent part of the decoration of Sir Albert's great house in Kensington Gore: while the "casket of jewels" sold after

Reuben Sassoon's death included such monstrosities as "a scarf-pin formed as a race-horse and jockey, set with small diamonds." But Edward Sassoon married a member of one of the most remarkable families of art-connoisseurs and collectors that Europe has ever known since the Renaissance—a Rothschild. She was endowed with intelligence as well as with wealth and taste: indeed, she and her sister Lucie, the later Baroness Léon Lambert, were the first women in French society to be qualified by the name "intellectuals." The result of the inter-breeding was remarkable, and students of heredity might well pay careful attention to it. Not only did the Sassoon house become a centre of literary and artistic life, but the next generation inherited, together with many of the Sassoon characteristics, all of the exquisite aesthetic sensibility of the Rothschilds.

Aline Sassoon arrived in London as a young bride when the somewhat fantastic coterie known to others as "The Souls" (they themselves indignantly repudiated not only the name, but even the idea of forming a clique) were the most significant if not the leading spirits in London Society: gifted men and beautiful women who found a new joy in every aspect of intellectual activity, and shocked and dazzled the staid Victorian dinner-tables by the freedom and brilliance of their conversation. They read the same books, went to see the same plays, sedulously avoided professing the same politics, and spent most week-ends in one another's houses. It was a mutual admiration society on an elaborate scale, prevented from

becoming commonplace by the mere fact of comprising in its numbers brilliant figures like Arthur James Balfour or the lovely Lady Granby or Lady Hayter (niece of that Henry Hope whose encouragement helped Disraeli in writing his earliest novels), whose parties in Grosvenor Square were intellectual experiences. The new arrival, knowing the background of French society and of French cultural life as no one else of the younger set in London knew it, was hailed by them as a sister spirit, or rather a sister Soul. They took her up with avidity. She dined with them, walked with them, rode with them, entertained them, was entertained by them, and shared in all those other delights "imponderable as gossamer and dew" in which they were absorbed. Margot Tennant (who afterwards married a promising young politician named Herbert Asquith) became her bosom friend. There was a striking tribute to her personal charm when His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, named his yacht *Aline*. Long after her death, men recalled the furore in London Society when Aline Sassoon first delighted it in the late eighteenthies.

Brighton was hardly a fitting setting for such a *ménage* as she established. Though they did not give up the house in Eastern Terrace (nor even the adjacent Mausoleum, in which Sir Edward Sassoon was to be laid temporarily to rest by his father's side) they acquired in due course other residences, more suitable for the entertaining that they felt obliged to do. There was a country house at Sandgate, on the Kentish coast (there was a special

reason for this, of a political nature, as will be seen); a shooting-box at Kincaig, Alvie Lodge, not far from the Arthur Sassoons; and, later on, a magnificent country house near Barnet, Trent Park, which had once belonged to the financier, Francis Bevan, first Chairman of Barclay's Bank (not to be confused with a less reputable namesake), and before that to the John Brown who was painted by Gainsborough. In town, the mansion in Kensington Gore was given up in favour of another in a more central position, Park Lane, then at the height of its fashionability and the magnet to which all the South African millionaires were attracted. The most resplendent of them all, Barney Barnato, had acquired a large site here, at the corner of Stanhope Gate, where he had erected as imposing a residence as money could command.<sup>1</sup> He died at sea in 1897, bleakly and mysteriously, before the building was finished. Sir Edward and Lady Sassoon now took it over, removed some of the worst offences against æsthetic canons (including the appalling statues that adorned the niches over the street) and made it their London home. It was certainly adequate for the purpose, in size at least, covering as it did nearly 13,000 square feet of floor-space. Finally, there were the two inherited Indian residences at Bombay and at Poona, Sans Souci and Garden Reach (though after his marriage Sir Edward was seldom seen so far from England) and the Hôtel in the Avenue Marigny in Paris, where Aline Sassoon continued

<sup>1</sup> In its great days, the mansion was known as 25 Park Lane; but owing to renumbering it has recently become number 45. To-day (September 1940) it stands empty and for sale, "suitable for an embassy or club."



to spend a good deal of time each year, entertaining magnificently, even after her marriage.

The houses, far too numerous to be homes, became a hub of literary and intellectual life. Lady Sassoon made a point of finding and encouraging young talent. She enjoyed the society of artists and men of letters, of the type which her uncles' resplendent set found so profoundly uninteresting. The leaders of French culture, who had been familiar in her father's home and those of the rest of the Paris clan, were welcome by her when they came to London and introduced to their English counterparts. In her many residences she entertained all and sundry: elder statesmen like A. J. Balfour, painters like her beloved John Sargent, writers like H. G. Wells, politicians like Winston Churchill ("Trying over his perorations at dinner," as the last-named wickedly observed), relics of a passing era like the Portuguese Minister, the Marquis de Soveral, said to have owed his position in English Society in the first instance to his extraordinary ability as a waltzer. Later on, when in premonition of her own early end she began to be preoccupied with thoughts of personal immortality, philosophical dabblers in the occult, such as Frederick William Henry Myers, might sometimes be met at her table, repaying her hospitality by attempting to throw light on the problems of future life—as a founder of the Society for Psychical Research and author of *The Subliminal Self* was clearly qualified to do.

Aline Sassoon did not only patronize art; she was herself an artist and portrait-painter of something

more than amateur status. (She was a member of the Pastel Society, and her works were not infrequently exhibited.) John Sargent's famous portrait of her, exhibited in 1907, has been described as being among the unforgettable achievements in modern British portraiture, and makes it possible for those who never saw her to appreciate, across the intervening vale of years, her alert personality, her highly strung and perhaps over-volatile temperament, and the exceptional distinction and refinement of her features.

Sir Edward Sassoon was somewhat bewildered by his wife's hectic activities. He was a less sophisticated soul, who, though by no means unambitious, followed obediently the dictates of the society in which he lived and far preferred convention to adventure. So, while Aline patronized artists and amused luncheon-tables, he dutifully pursued the path in life that seemed indicated by nature and the fitness of things for the head of the house of Sassoon. He looked the part: slender, trimly moustached and just sufficiently swarthy to make one suspect the Anglo-Indian rather than the Oriental. He dressed with meticulous care, for one circumstanced as he was could not risk the least unconventionality. He spoke a careful, clipped, uneventful English, a shade Babu in its unrelenting idiomativeness. His manner was polished, but some who originally considered it to be of exceptional distinction subsequently suspected that it was only flamboyant. This was, however, superficial, and those who knew him better found an amusing cynicism, as well as unbounded kindness, beneath the veneer.

So complete an Englishman could clearly think of Judaism only as nothing more than a religious tradition—not as a great national and cultural heritage to be preserved from the corroding influences of the era of assimilation and prepared for the bitter winds of adversity. Accordingly, though he loyally did his duty to his Synagogue and the various charities in which he was permitted by the omnipotent Rothschilds to play a part, he was quite impervious to any vital new current in Jewish life, such as Zionism; and he was used by some of his associates, albeit unsuccessfully, to browbeat into silence the lion-like Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, Moses Gaster, when he declared his allegiance to that movement shortly after it was launched by Theodor Herzl.

He managed the family business successfully, if unadventurously, with a pious devotion. After David Sassoon and Company was constituted a Limited Company, in 1901, he became its Chairman. He was on the Board too of other bodies in which the Sassoons had interests, such as the Bombay Electric Supply and Tramways Company and the Imperial Bank of Persia. Only the latter, though, was really important in the City sense. No Sassoon ever figured on the Board of one of the big banks, or of one of the great insurance companies. They were merchants, it must again be accentuated, but they were not financiers. He was also a director of the Daira Sanieh Company, formed to administer what had once been the Egyptian Crown Lands when Sir Ernest Cassel was attempting to introduce some sort of order into the

incredibly tangled financial affairs of the Khedivate. There was no direct Sassoon business interest involved in this, and it is to be assumed that on the recommendation of Cassel, Sir Edward purchased a large parcel of shares on his own account, and became a director. But all this added together came to very little, and Sir Edward Albert Sassoon played a relatively inconsiderable role in the city.

An English gentleman of the eighteen-nineties aspired to a seat in Parliament. The Sassoons, like most of the more moneyed class among English Jewry (led by the Rothschilds), had attached themselves to the Unionist party after the great Home Rule split, and when in 1899 a vacancy occurred for the Hythe Division of Kent, Sir Edward Albert Sassoon was sent down as the official candidate. This was a seat which had something of a Jewish tradition behind it notwithstanding (or perhaps because of) the fact that it had no perceptible element of Jewish voters; for Baron Mayer de Rothschild had represented it from 1859 onwards in the Liberal interest. It is, of course, notorious in anti-Semitic circles (the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, so beloved by Goebbels, give full details) that Jews always do everything in the world to assist one another to gain power. There was an opportunity for it in this case, as the former candidate who had contested the seat as a Liberal at the general election was Sir Israel Hart, a member of an old Kentish family. The Learned Elders, had they existed, would certainly have instructed one or the other of the two to stand down, rather than jeopardize the political chances of a fellow-Jew.

But, since neither of the candidates had heard of the Learned Elders, and both were thinking of nothing but their opinions, duties, and animosities as British citizens, the contest went on, and Sir Edward Sassoon was elected by an increased majority. He continued to represent the constituency until his death, his political opponents ultimately considering it pointless to oppose him on most occasions (he had an easy victory even during the Liberal landslide of 1906). The connexion with the constituency was ultimately strengthened by the acquisition of a local residence, Shornecliffe Lodge, where he lived the life of any other newly-imported country gentleman.

In Parliament, Edward Sassoon was not a particularly resplendent figure. He supported his party dutifully, not to say volubly, was a thorough-going imperialist, and later on was among the first representatives of commerce and industry who gave unqualified approval to Joseph Chamberlain's proposals for Tariff Reform, which would clearly benefit Anglo-Indian trade. In one or two points only he branched out into originality, and these were in connexion with matters in which he could claim some expert knowledge based upon personal experience—the Yellow Peril in the Far East, for example (which he discounted), or Russian aggression in Afghanistan (which he exaggerated).<sup>1</sup> Indian commerce was naturally one of his specialities, and he was a strong advocate of currency reform in India—

<sup>1</sup> As was natural in the head of an Anglo-French household, he was also an advocate of the Channel Tunnel, about which curiously little has been heard since May 1940.

at that time a vexed, and generally incomprehensible, problem of local politics. He became Secretary of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. But, above all, he interested himself in the question of the improvement of telegraphic communications with the sub-continent, a matter in which the interests of his firm coincided with those of the country. It was a question on which he was regarded as the prime, though not the most invigorating authority; he spoke upon it remorselessly both in the House of Commons and on the public platform; he wrote an unending series of letters about it to the Press: in default of other aspirants he became Chairman of the House of Commons Committee on Imperial Telegraphs; and in the end his efforts led to the appointment in 1901 of Lord Balfour's departmental committee to consider the subject. The report accepted some of his proposals only, but he persevered in his uninspiring campaign. He was rewarded by seeing successive and substantial reductions in cable rates and the provision of improved facilities, which were generally recognized to be due mainly to his efforts.<sup>1</sup>

This interest in telegraphy naturally led him to realize at an early stage the potentialities of Marconi's invention of the wireless method. Its advantages so much impressed him that he introduced a

<sup>1</sup> The first telegram had been dispatched from Bombay to London in 1865, but as it was delayed at Constantinople for ten days its effect was spoiled. An unexpected result of the opening of telegraphic communications with India was the diminution of crime in the Indian ports, as ships no longer waited about for freight leaving the sailors to their own devices.

Bill into Parliament to make a wireless equipment compulsory in all ocean-going passenger vessels. He was regarded as a crank at the time, and the Bill shared the fate of most private members' bills: but, in another world, he had the satisfaction of knowing that what he had pressed for so earnestly in the teeth of ridicule was at last enforced. A wealthy Conservative Member of Parliament of course had ample opportunities of expending his substance for the good of the country and of the party, and Sir Edward Sassoon was no exception. He cheerfully subscribed a sum of £1,000 for example towards the maintenance of the short-lived London newspaper, *The Evening Times*, though without concealing his conviction (which was fully borne out by the results) that he would never see it again.

On the other hand, Parliamentary preoccupations, buoyed up by the hope of a peerage, diverted his attention from other interests. Though he remained Chairman of David Sassoon & Company, he was less and less frequently seen in the City: he never again visited the sumptuous family residences that he maintained in India: he gave up by degrees his active participation in Jewish life, in which he was once so prominent: and his place in the Synagogue now saw him on only infrequent occasions.

In July 1909, Aline Sassoon died in her hôtel in the Avenue Marigny, in Paris, of a lingering illness. Her closest friends had come over from London to Paris to bid her farewell (Sir Edward Grey had written Margot Asquith a wonderful letter of condolence), but her greatest thought had been for



SIR EDWARD SASOON  
(*Caricature by "Spy"*)





her two young children, whom she anxiously commended to their care. She left a bagatelle of some £250,000—not so much for a Rothschild (in addition, her wonderful jewels were divided among her family and close friends). A year and a half later, in January 1911, her husband was thrown out of his car in a motor accident at Cannes, while he was staying on the Riviera. Though he did not suffer much physically, his nervous system was seriously shaken, and he was an ailing man until his own death in the Spring of 1912, at the age of fifty-six. He had belonged to that fortunate generation whose life had fallen within those few decades which, especially for persons of his stock in Western Europe, were the happiest that the world had ever known; when the greatest international upheaval that affected life was the Boer War, and the most disturbing event Mr Lloyd George's budget of 1909.

His will (the estate was proved at a little more than £1,000,000—a very considerable but not a fabulous sum) was a curious human document, recalling in many respects the ethical testaments that pious Jews of the Middle Ages left behind them for the guidance of their children. As a conscientious Conservative, he left nothing to charity, as a protest against the newly-increased death duties, for "any impost that tends to discourage charitable bequests, especially in a country like Great Britain whose healing agencies altogether depend on voluntary contributions, must, in my humble opinion, be radically wrong." (These delicate sentiments, nowadays commonplace, were then novel, and

were bitterly commented on in the Liberal press, which was not backward in pointing out the origin of the fortune that was being treated so reverently.)

There was good advice for the testator's two children, Philip Albert Gustave David (born in 1888) and Sybil Rachel Bettie Cécile (born in 1894): "I further earnestly impress upon them the necessity of avoiding all extravagance and gambling, and I earnestly hope that they will devote some part of their time and money to objects of benevolence. . . . I impress upon my said son the desirability of attending to the interests of the business of David Sassoon & Company, Limited, so that its reputation and standing so laboriously built up by his ancestors for close on a century may not be tarnished or impaired by the possible neglect or mismanagement of outsiders." Further, he strongly recommended his son and daughter to live together until either of them married, thus cherishing the memory of their mother, "this being her wish as well as my own."

Sir Edward Albert Sassoon was succeeded in the title by his son, Philip, and as Chairman of the firm by his only surviving uncle, Frederick, the youngest of David Sassoon's eight sons, who died in 1917. (He was a director also of the Imperial Bank of Persia, the Bank of China and Japan,<sup>1</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1889 as the Bank of China, Japan and the Straits; reconstructed in 1894 as the Bank of China and Japan; wound up in 1902.

Frederick's only son, Lieutenant Ronald Edward David Sassoon, of the King's Royal Rifles, who had been wounded in battle in 1916, died, unmarried and without issue, while on a visit to Baghdad in 1924.

Imperial and Foreign Investment and Agency Corporation, and the Trust and Loan Company of China, Japan and the Straits—all enterprises that exemplified the geographical extension of Sassoon interests in those years.)

It was realized at the time of the deaths of members of the Sassoon family at this period that, though the wealth of the house in the aggregate was very great, rumour grossly exaggerated it. It was certainly not on the scale of that of the House of Rothschild, which ranged up to the £30,000,000 left by Baron James in Paris. How much the original David Sassoon was worth at the time of his death is never likely to be known, but it was probably in the region of £4,000,000. However, though more than one of his descendants died a millionaire, none of them was fantastically wealthy, in terms of a Sir John Ellerman or a Rockefeller or a Carnegie. (It is, in fact, remarkable how completely Gentiles have outpaced Jews in what is regarded as the latter's speciality of money-making.) As has been seen, Sir Edward Albert Sassoon left about £1,000,000 and his father probably a similar amount: Arthur Sassoon, his uncle, rather more than £650,000 (exclusive of real estate in China): and the latter's youngest brother, Frederick, approximately the same. Details of Reuben's will were not published, but as his only son left about half a million pounds all told (including bequests to charity of larger amounts than were ultimately available for that purpose) it is to be presumed that his estate was of much the same dimensions as his brothers'. Aaron, who was not in the

business, left only £88,000. They were very wealthy men, and lived up to it, but none of them was (as the man-in-the-street imagined) a veritable Cræsus, and they owed their prominence far more to dispensing wealth than to amassing it.


Sir Edward Albert Sassoon was the only member of the family in the third generation who filled a part in English public life at all comparable to that of his father and uncles. But, nevertheless, there were several of his first cousins who were familiar figures in London society. There was his namesake, Edward Elias Sassoon, who succeeded to the direction of the firm of E. D. Sassoon & Company and to the second family baronetcy ("of the City of Bombay"), by special remainder, on the death of his brother Jacob in 1916, and lived in fine style in Grosvenor Place. A greater part was played in Society by his brother Meyer, who had represented the firm in London since the eighteen-eighties and who married his cousin Mozelle Gubbay (a granddaughter of Sir Albert Sassoon). Their house was in Hamilton Place, in the immediate vicinity of Rothschild Row at the top of Piccadilly, and a few doors off the residence of their connexion by marriage, Leopold de Rothschild, where so many famous men and women of the age might be met. At this beautiful mansion the Meyer Sassoons kept profuse hospitality, their balls, dinners and entertainments being a feature of Edwardian London. "There is no sign in this house of the departure of Israel's glory; everything shines with the greatest lustre," chronicled the Clerk of the Council, unofficially, on leaving a ball at the house one day

in 1904. For their country retreat, they had the originality to go further afield than most of their relatives, to Port Breton in Brittany, near Dinard. Meyer Sassoon himself, though a member of the family firm, took little active part in the business. He was more familiar by far in the West End than in the City, liked collecting pictures better than amassing wealth, and preferred to consider himself a member of the Cavalry Club than of E. D. Sassoon & Company. Such interests were left rather in the hands of the other surviving son of Elias Sassoon, yet another David, who also made his home in London but lacked the social ambitions (or at any rate, achievements) of his brothers. Both Sir Edward Elias Sassoon, second Baronet, and his brother Meyer died in 1924, within a few months of one another, and with them ended the tradition of the Society Sassoons of the Edwardian era.

The children of Sassoon Joseph Sassoon, of Ashley Park, the first of the family to settle in England, had struck out a line for themselves, and must be left for a separate chapter. As for the families of King Edward's two intimates, Arthur, in striking contrast to his father, had been childless, and when he died left the principal residuary interest in his estate to the children of his brother Reuben. The second of these was David, an only son, named after his grandfather, who was born in London in 1868 and received the conventional education of an English gentleman at Eton and Christ Church. But the verve and vitality that distinguished the older generation eluded him. He did little of note in the world except to become a director of the family

firm; and visitors to Brighton seldom thought that the dark little man, wearing a shabby green raincoat and cloth cap, who could be seen every morning on the Hove lawns studying the sporting news with passionate intensity in the intervals of distributing sweets to children, was the son of one of the late King's most intimate friends.<sup>1</sup>

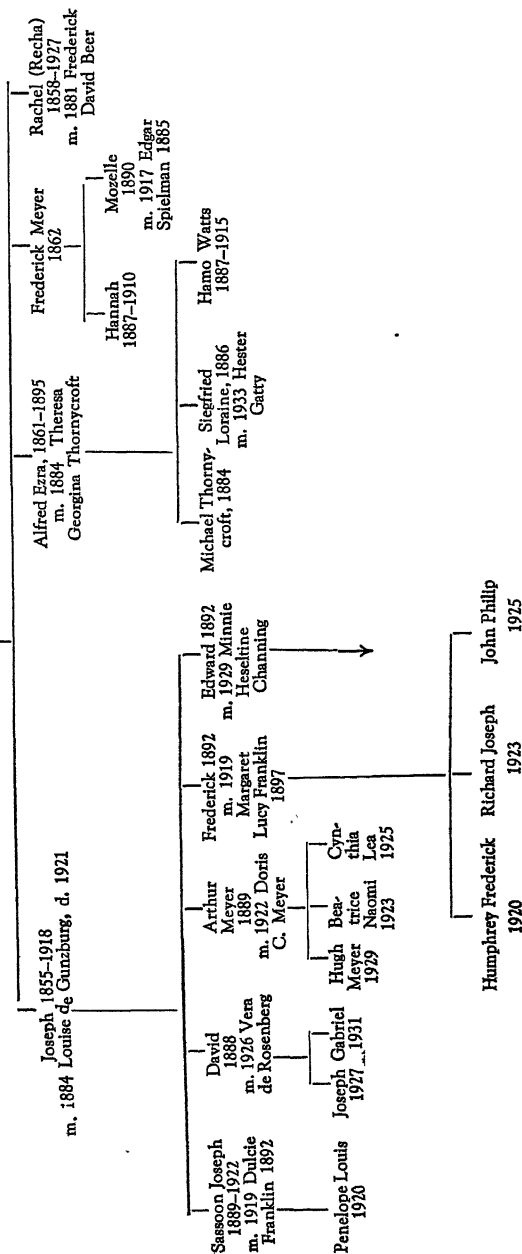
<sup>1</sup> He was Reuben Sassoon's only son, but four out of the five daughters reached maturity. One, Luna, married a Gubbay like her great-grandfather and hosts of other members of the family. Another, Flora, married Ernest G. Raphael, a member of the same old Anglo-Jewish family of merchant bankers to which her aunt, Mrs Frederick Sassoon, belonged. (It was on this occasion that the future King Edward was present at the wedding-breakfast). The other two married out of the Jewish faith—one, Rachel, becoming Mrs. Marrot, and the other, Louise, after her father's death, becoming the wife of Sir Charles Cavendish Boyle, K.C.M.G., formerly Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Mauritius (a great-grandson of the seventh Earl of Cork), who died two years after.



# THE SASSOONS OF ASHLEY PARK

## DAVID SASSOON

Sassoon David Sassoon, 1832-1867  
m. 1850 Flora Reuben, d. 1919





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SASSOONS OF ASHLEY PARK

It has already been observed twice in this book, but is none the less true, that the pioneer of the House of Sassoon in England was the original patriarch's third son, Sassoon David Sassoon, who was born in Bombay in August 1832. There is here, for students of hereditary influences, interesting matter for investigation. It is not unusual for high ability to run in families—the Rothschilds are an outstanding case in point. The latter were however all the offspring of the famous Mayer Amschel Rothschild and the astonishing Gudule Schnapper. With David Sassoon's posterity the case was different, as has been seen, for he married twice, Sassoon (named after his grandfather) being his eldest son by the second marriage. However, the children of both matches were equally of outstanding ability. All that perhaps differentiated the one brood from their half-brothers was that the sons of the earlier marriage (they were Albert-Abdullah and Elias) excelled in the world of business, and the others (who included Reuben and Arthur) in more urbane accomplishments also.

Young Sassoon David Sassoon had much the same upbringing as his brothers. At an early age, he was sent to Baghdad, the city of his father's origin,

where he was initiated into Biblical and Talmudic lore: and here, when he was eighteen years old, a wife was found for him—Farha (later known, like her homonyms, as Flora), a daughter of Solomon Reuben of that city. Subsequently, he went to Shanghai to assist in conducting the mercantile operations of the China branch of the firm. But before long it was found that a representative was needed in London as well, and in 1858, when he was twenty-six years old, he was sent there—the first member of the family to reach England other than his schoolboy brother, Arthur.

He must have been a man of outstanding ability. His remarkable range of linguistic knowledge and his extensive Eastern experience proved enormously useful to him. Before long, he occupied an important position in the City, directing a number of companies besides the Sassoon interests, which he governed with conspicuous ability and success through the hectic period of the American blockade and the boom in Bombay cotton to which it led. His means, ample when he first arrived, became very considerable indeed; and through him the name of Sassoon first became familiar to the English public.

His tastes did not lie in the same direction as those of other members of his family. Not for him the commonplace luxuries of the West End or the attractions of metropolitan life transferred to the Sussex coast at Brighton. He was a student, a collector, and a lover of the countryside. He was interested in all the Jewish institutions of London, but particularly the educational ones. He dutifully served as Warden of his Synagogue; he was on the Council

of the Jews' College, the recently established Theological Seminary for the training of Jewish ministers; and he condescended to act as Examiner in Hebrew to the Jews' Free School in the East End of London, of which he was a benefactor. He was interested in the exotic tribes of Israel scattered in remote corners of the globe—China, Abyssinia, and the Far East—and at one time tried to organize an expedition to investigate their condition under the direction of the thwarted explorer who, in imitation of his twelfth-century predecessor, Benjamin of Tudela, called himself Benjamin II. He had a notable collection, too, of Hebrew books, manuscripts, and works of art at his house in Cumberland Terrace, Regent's Park (subsequently to become noted through a Mrs Simpson). But notwithstanding all these urban attractions, he succumbed to the allurements of country life. Other wealthy English Jews with whom he rubbed shoulders had acquired their country estates—the Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury and the Salomons in Kent and the Montefiores on the Thanet coast and the Lousadas in Devon. This Oriental, who had never known the loveliness of English field and pasture until he had grown to manhood, felt the charm no less than they did, and expressed his devotion with perhaps more taste.

Ashley Park (originally Asshlees), near Walton-on-Thames, was an historic estate. In the fifteenth century it had belonged to the widow of Robert Constable. A hundred years later, in 1539, it had been annexed to the Honour of Hampton Court by Act of Parliament. Subsequently, it was occupied by Christopher Villiers, Earl of Anglesea, brother of

Charles I's Duke of Buckingham, and later on by Viscount Shannon. At the close of the eighteenth century, it had been acquired by Sir Henry Fletcher, Bart., a director of the East India Board: and it was his grandson, the fourth Baronet, who sold it to Sassoon David Sassoon, whose association with the Orient was more immediate. The estate was noted for the size and beauty of its trees, and the manor house, dating back to the beginning of the sixteenth century and build of mellow Tudor brick, was in the shape of a letter H, in honour of Henry VIII, under and for whom it had been built. This was the residence which the young Indian merchant acquired and began to fill with his somewhat exotic treasures.

He did not, however, occupy it for long. One day in the summer of 1867 he came up to Town to inspect the model of the statue of his father, executed by the sculptor Thomas Woolner for erection in the Mechanics' Institute in Bombay. But his heart was weak. The exertion, in the summer heat, proved too much for him, and he died after a sudden collapse. He had lived in England for only nine years, and was no more than thirty-five years of age. (His widow, incidentally, survived him by upwards of half a century, dying as recently as 1919; it was she who built the Public Hall in High Street, Walton-on-Thames, in 1879.)

This account of a worthy but not very eminent London Jewish merchant, of Indian birth and Baghdad origin, would be disproportionately long, were it not for the fact that his offspring included more than one outstanding personality, not of the conventional type that one associates generally with a

family of millionaires. It is interesting to note that they seem to have inherited something at least of their forebears' tastes. In his late 'teens, Sassoon David Sassoon dabbled in amateur journalism, and the earliest numbers of the first Jewish periodical issued in India are written entirely in his hand as well as edited by him. Following this tradition, his daughter was one of the pioneer woman journalists in England, and the only woman probably who has ever edited two English Sunday papers at the same time. Again, Sassoon David Sassoon, apart from his literary interests (not indeed in the direction of English letters) was a devotee of the English country life, though only a newcomer. His grandson is among the most eminent of contemporary English poets, and chronicler of the life of the Shires.

There is no need, accordingly, to follow up in any detail the uneventful history of the main line of the Sassoons of Ashley Park (as Burke's *Landed Gentry* elegantly calls them, even now that they have left Ashley Park behind). The eldest son of the family, Joseph, born in Bombay in 1855, was only eleven years old at the time of his father's death. He led the ordinary life of any other young Englishman in his position. He went up to Oxford as a matter of course, settled down at Ashley Park, collected books and old English furniture, and married a daughter of Baron Horace de Gunzburg of St. Petersburg, the millionaire banker, philanthropist, and bibliophile. Of their five sons, four were Army men, in Dragoon, Hussar, and Artillery regiments. Incidentally, this branch of the family, descended from the most enthusiastic Hebrew scholar among the Sassoon

brothers, is the only one that has omitted the Hebrew quotation from its coat-of-arms, retaining only its Latin equivalent.

Leaving other members of the family on one side for the moment, we may now turn to the other child of Sassoon David Sassoon who had been born at Bombay. This was Rachel, who had been brought to London by her parents, a child of only a few months old, in 1858, and who was in some ways the most remarkable member of the entire family. The part of a woman pioneer in England in the last century was not smooth. It was made more difficult by far in the case of one who had all the difficulties of acclimatization in the European world added to those of anti-feminism. But her determination overrode all such obstacles.

Her father's early death possibly made it easier for a self-willed child to break out into unconventional paths. At one time, she saw herself as a second Florence Nightingale, and for two years was an unpaid hospital nurse. But afterwards she found that her tastes led her in the direction of journalism, her father's early love. It is one of the careers in which means can ensure opportunity, though not necessarily success. In 1887, Rachel Sassoon, in her thirtieth year (when her Baghdadi ancestresses would have been looking forward to the birth of their grandchildren) married Frederick Arthur Beer, of Stratton Street, the delicate son of a London financier. It was a union of two great fortunes. The husband was said to be worth £20,000 a year, and the marble staircase of the house that the couple occupied in Chesterfield Gardens was rumoured

(after the fashion of such trifles) to have cost him a similar amount—precisely a year's income! Here they lived in oppressive luxury, in unventilated rooms filled with lacquered Oriental furniture, the walls hung with priceless pictures chosen on the criterion of cost rather than of æsthetic appeal. The ubiquity of the family crest, a pelican feeding its young, testified to its novelty (it was even clipped out on the back of the little French poodle) and a retinue of servants bearing it on their livery greeted the guests. In this setting or at her villa in Richmond, similarly over-adorned, Rachel Sassoon—dark-haired, pale, handsome, and invariably late—dispensed lucullan hospitality, in which her ailing husband was less and less able to participate.

Financiers have a faculty for becoming involved in a variety of enterprises in which their direct interest (as distinguished from their interests) is small; and Frederick Arthur Beer happened to be the proprietor of *The Observer*—at that time one of a galaxy of respectable Sunday papers. This journalistic connexion exercised a fatal fascination on his wife. It would provide her with an outlet for her energy, which was vast, and for her abilities, which no-one could call small. Writing was after all a task which called for a minimum of physical energy, and was thus pre-eminently suited for one of the feebler sex; and what a man could do in the way of journalism, she, Rachel Beer, could do as well. She began to send articles to the paper, which the Editor would not have been in a position to reject, whatever their merit. After a time, she decided that she would like to be appointed Assistant Editor. Finally, she

became Editor. In this capacity, she took a considerable part in organizing the Press Bazaar at the Hotel Cecil in the winter of 1896, when a small boy named Siegfried Sassoon (Rachel Beer's nephew) was one of the retinue of *Observer* pages—hardly of folio size—who greeted the Princess of Wales.

Appetite grew through eating. At the office of *The Observer*, Rachel Beer was not quite her own mistress, so long as the proprietorship lay in the hands of anyone else—even in those of her husband. In 1893, however, *The Sunday Times* (already *The Observer's* rival, though not virtually its only one as it is to-day) came into the market, and she determined to acquire it in her own name.

Who should direct its policy but herself? Without therefore giving up her connexion with *The Observer*, she took upon herself the editorship of *The Sunday Times* as well, which she continued to direct until 1904. Thus for a considerable time she was the editor of both of the two rival papers—an achievement that no other woman has emulated before or since. (It puts into the shade the comparatively mediocre performance of Lady Bathurst, who directed *The Morning Post* for a time on the death of her father, Lord Glenesk.)

It was no wonder that, at a time when women were none too frequently met in that profession, Rachel Beer became a Member of the Institute of Journalists. As for the Institute of Woman Journalists, she not unnaturally regarded it as her special preserve. A recent historian of Fleet Street speaks of her as probably the most successful of all woman journalists, this amazing Jewess born at Bombay of



Baghdadi parentage, who had all the disadvantages of origin added to those of her sex.

It was naturally in *The Sunday Times* that her personality had its more complete expression. Originally the organ of independent liberalism, under her editorship it took up an objective attitude in politics—an almost sensational piece of originality in the era when every British boy or girl born into this world alive was either a little Liberal or else a small Conservative. "Standing outside the trammels of party," an observer wrote in 1895, "*The Sunday Times* is enabled to watch the struggle of party politicians as an entomologist observes the contests of rival tribes of ants."

But this sound general policy was offset by the Editor's insistence on annexing the work of detail as well as the general direction. Though sketchily, and to a large extent self-educated, she prided herself enormously on her literary flair. She insisted on writing her own leaders in a particularly illegible hand, or—what was more disconcerting to the compositors—dictating them at the last minute. They were competent, if dull. They had all the shrewdness and commonsense of her sex, but even when they were to the point they were generally lacking in punch and driving power. But they were not always to the point. She had a weakness for hitting upon bizarre topics, which readers can hardly have found edifying or enlightening. (There was one famous occasion, still remembered in Fleet Street, when she decided to direct attention to what she considered the vital problem of cannibalism!) She insisted too on doing much of her own reviewing,

and on retaining review copies, which in the spacious days of elephantine biographies and three-volume novels occupied a disproportionate amount of space; and in the end the accumulation of uncut and uninspected literature sent on behalf of aspirant authors left little room to move in her palatial mansion. The whole affair was, however, something of a *tour de force*. It was probably intended to show the world that a woman could edit a newspaper, and in this it was effective. But her editing was not a brilliant success. After her day, *The Observer* was purchased by Lord Northcliffe for £4,000; when he had put it on its feet, he sold it to Waldorf Astor for £60,000.

Journalism was only one of the many interests of this astonishing woman. Her recreations were described in her official autobiography as work and sleep: she certainly enjoyed the one, and deserved the other. She continued to devote attention to the conditions of the nursing profession. She was a devotee of music. She composed and even published pieces for the piano and other instruments. Her conversation was rich in originality, and she could draw upon a fund of remarkable memories, many relating to her hospital experiences. But as time went on her eccentricities grew on her more and more, and her work was not made easier by her insuperable unpunctuality (it was nothing for her to have to take a special train to keep an unimportant social engagement). Nevertheless, while she was throwing herself with headlong enthusiasm into all these many interests, and presenting a brave face to the world, her life was clouded by the domestic

tragedy of her ailing husband, whom she nursed with perfect love and devotion, never leaving him for more than a few hours at a time, until he could be nursed no more.

Rachel Beer remained on friendly terms with the family of the brother from whom the rest of the family were more or less estranged. This was Alfred Ezra Sassoon, her father's second son and the first of the family to be born in England. He must have been an astonishing person. A headstrong youth, deprived of his father's restraining hand when he was little more than a baby, he seems to have determined to get the best out of life. In his 'teens, he went over to Paris, threw money about lavishly and set up his establishment, giving an impression of astonishing wealth.<sup>1</sup> Among the persons whom he entertained was Sarah Bernhardt, who spoke of him as "the richest Cræsus in the world." (She cannot have credited that at this time, in 1877, her host was not yet twenty years of age: Orientals mature quickly.) She was entertained by him not long after her wonderful success in Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, and lost in the house one of her most treasured possessions—a fine chain bracelet, with a diamond drop attached, which she had received from the aged poet after the performance together with the following note:

Madame;

You have been great and charming. You have

<sup>1</sup> There are other members of the family who cut a figure in Parisian society at this period. The open-handed hospitality of Mrs A. M. Gubbay, a daughter of Sir Albert Sassoon, horrified the French anti-semitic, who presumably was not invited.



The Observer

(Established 1791)



*F C Beer*

Sunday Times.



*Rachel Beer*

RACHEL BEER AND HER HUSBAND



roused me—me, the old combatant—and, at one moment, while the public whom you enchanted cheered you, I wept. This tear which you caused me to shed is yours, and I place myself at your feet.

*Victor Hugo.*

The actress was aghast at her loss. Minute search was made, but the jewel could not be found. Her host, Alfred Sassoon, gallantly offered to replace it, but she refused: he could not give me back the tear of Victor Hugo, she wrote.

Brought up in this manner, lacking paternal guidance, intermingling in all society, Alfred Ezra Sassoon was the first member of his family to marry outside the Jewish faith. Much is spoken about the Jewish exclusiveness in the matter of marriages, as though they were the only section of humanity who have this tendency. This is, of course, far from the case. Any persons of whatever creed who are profoundly convinced of the tenets that they hold must view with abhorrence the idea of marriage with a person of different religious views; for this must inexorably divide the unity of the home and in addition present a problem in connexion with the education and upbringing of the children of the marriage. Naturally, it is possible to reach an amicable arrangement in the matter, but there is no guarantee that the amicable arrangement will work, or even be carried out save with difficulty. The Catholic Church has, of course, its special regulations in such cases, and generally is able to ensure a more punctual fulfilment. The Quakers, on the other hand, found it wisest to adopt a completely negative

attitude, though without its being considered in their case a mark of a particularly large dose of original sin: for it was not until 1859 that it became possible for a Quaker to marry a non-Quaker and still remain a member of the Society of Friends, and the policy was permanently changed only in 1870.

When profound religious conviction is absent, on either side or on both, this particular difficulty does not arise—not at least in such an acute form. The weaker party may embrace the religion of the stronger. Like other faiths (though with rather less avidity, for it is unique in its lack of enthusiasm for proselytization, and teaches that heaven may be reached by many paths) Judaism makes provision for such cases, and the purity of the Jewish stock has been modified continuously throughout the ages by an influx of converts of this type, whose offspring occasionally, though by no means invariably, have remained in the community. Alternatively, the difficulty can be burked, simply by attempting not to recognize that it is there or by the “compromise” of bringing up the children in no religion at all (which in practice is equivalent to leaving them to the faith which is dominant in the country).

On the other hand, the problem is not one only of the children. The successful marriage should be based on as close an affinity as possible of taste, interests, background, mental equipment and approach. This is not to say that when these elements are lacking the marriage is necessarily a failure, but that its chances of failure increase. Hence extra-marriage of any pronounced type is not to be commended; hence Jews, without profound religious

conviction, object to their children "marrying out" of the ancestral stock and faith. But on the other hand, though such marriages tend to be precarious, they tend also to produce children endowed with the intellectual qualities of both strains in their ancestry. *Pace* Hitler and his erudite disciples, it is precisely among persons of mixed origin that genius sometimes produces its most amazing fruits.

This somewhat lengthy exordium to the story of the marriage of Sassoon David Sassoon's third child is rendered necessary by the fact that it exemplified both of these facts. It was an abysmal failure, but not before producing the most English of English imaginative writers of to-day.

On January 30th, 1884, Alfred Ezra Sassoon married Theresa Georgina Thornycroft, a daughter of the sculptor Thomas Thornycroft (who executed the group on the Albert Memorial purporting to represent Commerce), and his equally gifted wife, herself a daughter of the sculptor, John Francis. The family genius was hereditary. The new Mrs Sassoon herself shared some of her father's ability; one of her brothers was Sir John Isaac Thornycroft, the naval architect, who built the first British torpedo-boat; and another was Sir William Hamo Thornycroft, the sculptor, whose works include the statue of Gordon in Trafalgar Square, that of Gladstone in the Strand, and that of Cromwell (but for whom his sister might have married more happily, for he was responsible for the readmission of the Jews to England) at Westminster.

Such hereditary genius might be anticipated to




produce notable results when allied with that of the Sassoons. Of the three sons of the marriage, one, Second-Lieutenant Hamo Watts Sassoon, of the Royal Engineers, died in 1915 of wounds received in action, but not before he had shown promise as a sculptor similar to that which had distinguished his mother's family in three generations. Another is Siegfried<sup>1</sup> Loraine Sassoon, whose autobiography, *The Old Century and Seven More Years* (London, 1938) reveals delicately but poignantly the tragedy of his parents' married life, which a stranger would otherwise have hesitated to touch upon at all. From his earliest recollections, when he was only five years old, the rambling old house in Kent was a house without a father, where "Pappy" paid the rarest of visits, bearing gifts of pomegranates or guava jelly, and pretending not to see the wife because of whom he had quarrelled with his family if he unexpectedly came face to face with her while romping with his boys in the garden. "Pappy" inherited something of his father's constitutional weakness. The boys were taken down to Eastbourne to see him for the last time, and in the early spring of 1895 he died. The two elder boys went to the funeral in London. "Two old men in funny-looking hats walked up and down saying jabber-jabber" was how the descendant of a long line of Jewish scholars described the ceremony at the Synagogue burial-ground.

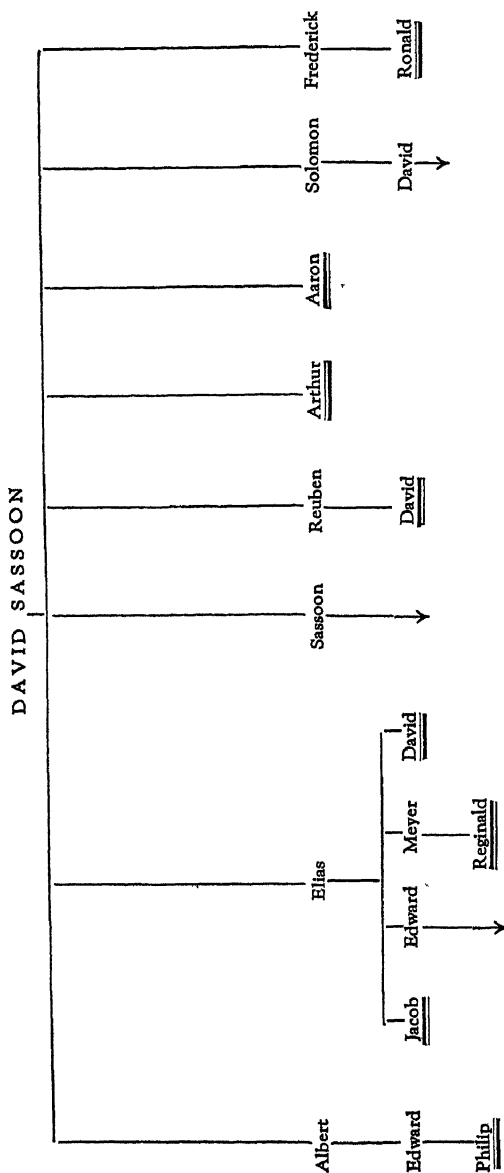
Joseph Sassoon, of Ashley Park, Alfred's elder

<sup>1</sup> The name Siegfried, reflecting plainly enough the atmosphere of the late eighteen-eighties, was presumably intended as a vague approximation to Sassoon, the first (it is impossible to say the 'Christian') name of Alfred Sassoon's father.

brother, outlived him by nearly a quarter of a century. He was succeeded as head of his branch of the family, when he died in 1918, by the eldest of his brood of military sons, Sassoon Joseph Sassoon, Captain in the Inniskilling Dragoons. On the latter's death in 1922, he left instructions that Ashley Park was to be sold, and it is now a building estate. The present head of the family is his brother, a David Sassoon of the fourth generation, the artist, who resides in High Street, Kirkcudbright. The interlude as country gentlemen lasted for not much longer than half a century. But this branch of the family, invigorated by the experience, is the only one in the Sassoon clan which may still be said to flourish in the direct male line.



## THE EXTINCTION OF THE HOUSE OF SASOON



(See Table iii)

(See Table ii)

Only male children who reached maturity are shown ; underlining indicates extinction of the male line.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FOURTH GENERATION

A GREAT deal has been said in contemporary Germany regarding the peril which results from allowing Jews to mix with other persons on equal terms. The logic of this is not very easy to see. The only European country in which the share of the Jews in cultural life has been overwhelmingly great is Germany; and, since Jews are everywhere presumably on much the same cultural level, one is driven to the conclusion that this is not because the Jews are so brilliant, but because the Germans are so stupid. And they have demonstrated their stupidity above all in their anti-Semitic policy. Greatness is achieved by a country which has the faculty (like the old Roman Empire) to welcome and absorb ability, whatever its source; and foreign blood has enriched England with genius, such as that of Queen Victoria, Benjamin Disraeli, Edward Gibbon, Dr Barnardo, and Winston Churchill (not to mention Mr Neville Chamberlain). Moreover, if any specific element in society be considered undesirable, the way to disarm it is not by oppression, which invariably results in philoprogenitiveness and a disproportionate increase in number, but by toleration and encouragement, which result in rapid extinction. It is a scientific and statistical fact that the Jews of Germany

were decreasing rapidly in numbers, and were on the verge of extinction by the very simple process of race-suicide, when Nazidom suddenly singled them out for persecution. In other countries of Western Europe too, the Jew, essentially a *bourgeois*, belongs to that stratum of society which of late has signally failed to maintain its numbers by natural increase. Unlike the same social stratum among their neighbours, however, there is no vast reservoir beneath them from which they can be replenished. Hence, in every place where Jews were treated favourably, there was until recently the imminent probability that they would become an extinct species within a measurable period, even if they remained faithful to their ancestral beliefs and did not lose the religious differentiation which was the ultimate basis of their separate existence.

These are generalizations, but they are easy enough to demonstrate from specific instances. Half of the Jewish families established in England in the eighteenth century are now extinct—and the posterity of the other half is more often to be sought in the Church than in the Synagogue. Isaac d'Israeli, father of the Earl of Beaconsfield, had four sons and one daughter; but when Major Coningsby Disraeli died, a few years back, in 1936, he was the last surviving member of the family, settled in England by then for two centuries. Or take the English Rothschilds. Nathan Mayer had, besides three daughters (a study of whose posterity would complicate this inquiry), four sons, but only two of them left posterity in the male line. Other families, less well known, provide much the same picture.

But the Sassoon record is particularly interesting, for the process has in their case taken place with such astonishing rapidity. David Sassoon, founder of the family and of the business-house, had, as we have seen, eight sons besides his six daughters. To pursue the latter into all their genealogical intricacies is impossible here: it is enough to follow up the male line only, which preserved the family name. Had the eight sons followed their father's example, it might have been expected that there would be sixty-four grandchildren and hundreds of great-grandchildren, while the task of giving an account of the fourth generation would require volumes. But the facts were astonishingly different. All of David Sassoon's eight sons married, indeed, with only one exception: and Elias, with his six sons and three daughters, almost rivalled his father's arithmetical achievement. But improvement in social status, coupled with occidentalization and changing standards of life, achieved what Oriental epidemics had failed to do; and the intense inbreeding to which reference has been made, probably hastened and intensified the process.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding Elias's prolificity, all the eight Sassoon brothers had only fourteen male children between them, not all of whom grew to manhood. Thereafter, the decline was catastrophic. The eldest son, Albert, had two sons—but only one grandson bearing his surname; and his family is now extinct in the male line, as are also those of his brothers Reuben and Frederick (their only sons died childless), Arthur (who had no children) and Aaron

<sup>1</sup> I do not mention war casualties, which also played their part, as this was an external, and not an exclusive, factor.

(who was unmarried). There is no longer any male posterity, therefore, in the case of no less than six, out of the eight brothers! Elias, for all his six sons, had only three grandsons in the male line. Sassoon alone was more fortunate, reversing the proportions with three sons and eight grandsons. Thus, we have the curious result that (omitting, as I have said, posterity in the female line, which did not perpetuate the family name) David Sassoon's eight sons and fourteen grandsons brought him all told only thirteen great-grandsons, or excluding the issue of the third son Sassoon (whose line only is in a healthy demographic condition to-day) only five. Moreover, of these at least three died without issue and others as it happens do not profess Judaism. It is worth while to have spent a little time on the examination of this process, typical of the social class to which the Sassoon family belonged, but obviously more widely spread in the Jewish than in the non-Jewish community—one of the most significant phenomena in the contemporary scene.

Our survey of the fourth generation of the family then, which by all natural criteria should have been a formidable task, is relatively simple. Instead of a constantly spreading inverted pyramid, as every self-respecting family tree should be, that of the Sassoons is shaped more like a diamond, starting at a point, widening out rapidly, and tapering disastrously towards the bottom. In this generation, moreover, there is little left of the specific quality of the Sassoons of a previous age. They are now, for the most part, English in upbringing, in outlook, to some extent in "blood" (if one may use for the sake

of convenience a term based upon an exploded medieval embryological theory, which is used by contemporary Germany as the basis of its public policy). There is not much left, now, of the fabulous luxury of its predecessors. They are, if anything, an Army family: and those who stand out from their cousins include only one business-man. The others are a politician, a poet, and a steeplechase rider.

In the war of 1914-18, at least fourteen grandsons and great-grandsons of the original David Sassoon held commissions in the British Army, four of them being in Cavalry regiments and one in the Guards. One of them was killed in action, several were wounded, three were decorated, and one, Siegfried (of whose early background an account has been given above), made his name as perhaps the most remarkable poet thrown up by the eruption. When the war broke out, his name was known only to a small circle, though he had already issued anonymously or pseudonymously several small privately printed volumes of verses, which gained the warm commendation of Edmund Gosse, a connexion, by marriage, of his mother (he had written in 1908 of *Orpheus in Diloeryum*, a skit upon the pseudo-cultured: "It reminds me of some of the strange entertainments of the early Renaissance"; and in 1913, *à propos* of *The Daffodil Murderer*—ostensibly from the pen of one Saul Kain, which had gained the Chantrey Prize—pronounced that "It is time, I think, for you to begin to tilt up the bushel under which your light has hitherto been burning").

In August 1914 Siegfried enlisted, served for nine months as a trooper in a yeomanry regiment, and



then received a commission in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers ("The Flintshire Fusiliers" of his writings). He proved an excellent soldier. He was awarded the Military Cross for gallant conduct in rescuing the wounded under fire, and was himself hit.

Before he went up the line he had regarded war in the conventional romantic light and objected to its being described realistically. But the actualities of modern battle changed his point of view. His gay spirit was revolted by the mud and the blood and the filth, and his poetic gifts were diverted from pastoral pieces in the style of the eighteen-nineties to what had become the warp and woof of the lives of all the young men in England. The result was a series of flaming, indignant poems reflecting all the brutality and ugliness of war, its inconsistencies and its hideous waste. Some of these appeared at the close of his first normally published volume, *The Old Huntsman* (1917; the title-piece, anticipatory of some of his later prose-work, began as a satire on Masfield but half-way through forgot to be a satire): others saw the light week by week in that curious war-time anomaly, *The Cambridge Review*. One who in 1918 was a very young soldier recalls the perplexity caused to his superior officers, not a very literary or even literate band, by his regular receipt of this unmilitary publication, and the particular satisfaction he derived from verses like the following:

"Good morning, good morning!" the General said,  
As we passed him one day on our way to the Line.  
Now the men that he smiled at are most of them  
dead,  
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.

"He's a cheery old card," grinned Harry to Jack,  
As they slogged up to Arras, with rifle and pack—

But he murdered them both with his plan of  
attack.

Or, in *The Old Huntsman* (of which the author sent a copy "for fun" to Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France):

I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,  
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or "Home, sweet  
Home."  
And then, there'd be no more jokes in music-  
halls,  
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.

*Counter-Attack* (1918) was even more unrestrained. Indignation, it has been said, never made fiercer verses than these.

On his first meeting with Arnold Bennett, about this time, Sassoon told him that most of war was a tedious nuisance, but there were great moments and he would like to experience them again. But on his return from convalescence in 1916 he decided that his supreme duty was not to kill others, but to make things more tolerable for the men under his command. Accordingly, when he was detailed to rehearse for the great Fricourt attack, he led his platoon into a wood and read them *The London Mail*, which they probably appreciated more than he did. Yet this did not impair his military efficiency. On one occasion, he went over with bombs in daylight, under covering fire from a few rifles, and scared the occupants out of a trench near Mametz Wood,

from which the Irish Regiment had recently been repulsed with heavy loss. However, instead of signalling for reinforcements, he sat down in the trench and dozed over a book of poems, not troubling (to his commanding officer's intense fury) to report his feat after his return. During the fighting in the Hindenburg Line in 1917, he captured a heavily manned German trench with a bombing-party of six. For his courage on this occasion, he was recommended for the D.S.O. (according to an American authority, for the V.C.!), but, as the Cameron Highlanders, whom his platoon were supporting, were afterwards driven out, the attack was regarded officially as a failure and the award was not made. During the attack he was shot through the neck and before long was invalided home, "a beastly wreck and in a rotten state of nerves," suffering from trench fever and seeing highly unpleasant visions.

At this point, his indignation against the war reached flaming point. In July 1917 this brave soldier, holder of the Military Cross, issued a statement in which he intimated his refusal to serve further. "I am making this statement," he said, "because I believe that this war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. . . . I have seen and endured the sufferings of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust."

One wonders whether he himself now agrees in his heart of hearts with the attitude that he took up

twenty-three years ago: for it has surely become clear, thanks to German policy in the past few years, that consistent pacifism is logical only when it can be practised on equal terms in all countries, and that anything other than a German defeat would have been then, as it would be to-day, an overwhelming disaster for humanity at large. The fact that even in war-time his "Soldier's Declaration" could be published in England (as it was in the Bradford Press), and even read out in Parliament, was some indication of the measure of difference between the two sides and a demonstration that the English claim to be fighting for a higher cause was not a hollow one. But his action was not taken too seriously (this transition from M.C. to C.O. was somewhat too violent) and his friend, Robert Graves, who belonged to the same regiment and whose acquaintance he had made at the Front as a result of reading unmilitary literature,<sup>1</sup> saved him from drastic consequences by what Sassoon described as "a very successful lie," but was possibly even more innocent. He was examined by a medical board, which decided that he was suffering from mental strain and sent him to a home for neurasthenics at Craiglockhart, which he called Dottyville. On his "recovery", he was sent back to his regiment and served first in Palestine and then again in France, where he was once more wounded—this time in the head—and was promoted to the rank of captain, surviving even this.

<sup>1</sup> There is a full account in Graves' autobiography *Goodbye to All That*. See also, in his *Poems 1914—1926*, his "Familiar letter to Siegfried Sassoon."

In the Jingo Election after the Armistice (when another member of his family stood as an out-and-out Lloyd Georgist) he went down to support Philip Snowden, whose pacifism during the war had earned him the enviable distinction of being one of the best-hated men in England. Defying all regulations, he appeared on the election platform wearing his uniform. He was not much of an orator, though his noble head gave him an impressive appearance and his transparent sincerity gave weight to what he said. His point of view, on the other hand, was hardly popular at a time like that, and only his Military Cross ribbon and his three wound-stripes saved him from assault on more than one occasion. He then had a spell as Literary Editor of the *Daily Herald*, but, finding Fleet Street not quite to his taste, afterwards returned to the more congenial atmosphere of poetry, horses and the country. *Picture Show* (privately printed in 1919), *Satirical Poems* (1926), *The Heart's Journey* (1927), as well as the fantastic *Lingual Exercises for Advanced Vocabularians* (1925), marked successive stages in a widening of interest and a diminution of the war neurosis. (One may mention also, *à titre de bibliographie*, *The Road to Ruin* (1933), *Vigils* (1935), *Rhymed Ruminations* (1939), and, parenthetically, *Poems* by Pinchebeck Lyre (1931)).

It was on the basis of the first-fruits of this output that Gosse had pronounced his judgment, that "among the three or four writers under the age of fifty of whom it may safely be predicted that their verse will outlive the fashion of the moment, Mr Siegfried Sassoon has an assured place."

Suddenly, another world was conquered, by a change of medium, comparable only perhaps to that achieved by Thomas Hardy in his later years. In 1928, the nimrods of the Shires are said to have overwhelmed their booksellers with orders for a new anonymously published work, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, which had received enthusiastic reviews. It was not by any means what they had expected. The evolution of a passion for the most English of open-air sports was analysed with an extraordinary objectivity and in a prose which could bear comparison with the finest in the language. There was in the work all of what has been described as the mingled detachment and closeness of the essentially English writing—the detachment, it may be, of the Sassoons, and the closeness of the Thornycrofts. Seldom has the atmosphere of the English countryside and the feeling of English country life been so exquisitely conveyed. The book was awarded the Hawthornden Prize in the year after its appearance, and gained for the author the incomparable compliment of being bracketed with Surtees as a classical portrayer of the hunt.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by *The Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930)—already recognized as the classical account of the life in the trenches in 1914–18—*Sherston's Progress* (1936), and *The Old Century* (1938). This completes a series of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works to which future generations will look back for a picture of English country life and of the English countryside as it existed in the first years of the

<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Harvey Darton, *From Surtees to Sassoon* (London 1931).

twentieth century, and of the witches' cauldron in Flanders in which that life bled to death. As a critic has written: "He has survived the most terrible of all wars, illuminated it first with his poetry which made him famous, and later with his prose which has assured him a place amongst the truly great and, retiring to the country, has exercised himself with rural things." The mental vigour of the pious David Sassoon, who never spoke English or wore European dress; the unfulfilled literary tastes of his son, Sassoon, who coming from the East was enthralled by the English countryside: the restless strivings of his grandson, Alfred, who sought his life-partner, not happily, outside the ancestral clan, in a family of English artists: all these strains went to make up in the fourth generation the complex personality of Siegfried Sassoon, interpreter of English country life in the purest of English prose. England! England! Do not close your gates to the needy and the oppressed, nor make those that have come here feel that they are unwelcome. The fathers of other Siegfried Sassoons may be knocking at your gates to-day.

The steeplechaser of the Sassoon family, Siegfried's second cousin and contemporary, was perhaps the most remarkable of all of that generation. Or perhaps he wasn't. Jews, once said a profound philosopher, are much the same as other people, only more so; and to become so intimately identified with English life in its most intimate sense, without any of the internal paradox of the career we have just examined, was not in contradiction, but in fulfilment, of the Jewish character. There was no

reason to anticipate that Reginald Ellice Sassoon (the Ellice was an ingenious transmogrification of Elias, his grandfather's name<sup>1</sup>), would have followed anything different from the typical Sassoon career both in business and in pleasure. The reverse, indeed, for he had more than the normal element of Sassoon blood in his veins, his father, Meyer Sassoon, a son of Elias David, having married, as we have seen, his cousin, Mozelle Gubbay, a granddaughter of Sir Albert Sassoon. But the war of 1914-18, which began when he was twenty-one, altered the hitherto even tenor of his life. He obtained a commission in the Irish Guards, rose to the rank of Captain and gained the Military Cross. His courage when on active service was unbounded. "He was the only man I ever met who seemed to be born without fear of any kind," a friend recorded of him after his death. "He seemed really to enjoy dangerous situations: it may be he courted risk for the excitement it gave him." Another wrote: "At the end of the war, this man, with manners as quiet as those of a field-mouse, was garlanded with the wreath of a hero, and it was handed to him by no field-marshal or general, but by the men who mattered most—the Guardsmen who knew him and loved him."

It was not easy for a man of this type to dance

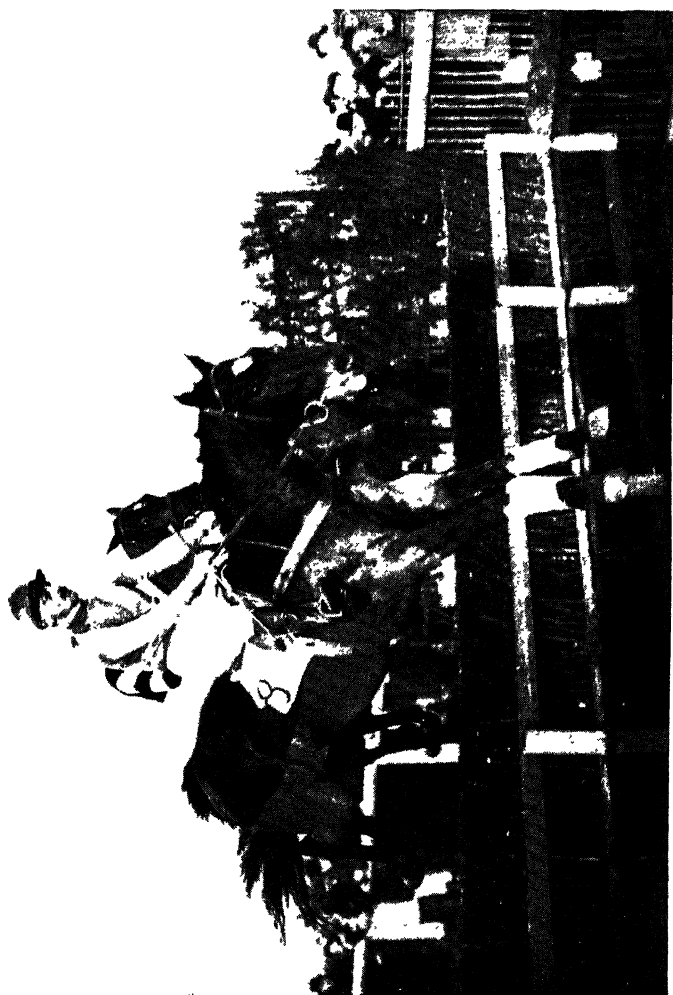
<sup>1</sup> The same alteration took place in the case of Reginald's first cousin (Sir) Ellice Victor Sassoon, whose parents however had transposed the order. It is to be noted that in this generation, and branch, of the family the former practice of appending the father's first name to that of each son, so as to distinguish him from possible homonyms belonging to another branch, was abandoned.



tamely to the pipings of peace when at last they came. He, of course, entered the family business, being a director of the two Elias David Sassoon companies, as well as of Arnhold & Company, Limited, through which many of its trading interests in the Far East and elsewhere were now ostensibly managed,<sup>1</sup> and of the Eastern Bank<sup>2</sup>; and he spent a good part of every year in Shanghai and India as a business magnate in the historic Sassoon tradition. But his heart was not in this sort of life, and, war being temporarily ended, he had to find some alternative excitement. The Sassoons in India, unlike their English cousins (whose interests were only slight), had for a long time played a prominent and successful role on the Turf and owned some famous race-horses, and it was natural for him to follow this example. But he was not a man for vicarious adventure. Soon after the outbreak of peace, he purchased a string of horses and began to ride them regularly in races under National Hunt rules. His friends were secretly amused, for he had begun to ride only after he joined the Army, and at the outset was hardly an accomplished horseman, much less steeplechaser. However, the same determination that had made him a good soldier made him in the end an excellent rider. Every winter regularly he came back from the Far East to take part in racing. In the end, after being something of a joke on the racecourse, he became, by dint of perseverance and courage, one of the boldest and most skilled owner-riders of the day. His popularity, moreover, was

<sup>1</sup> See below, page 225.

<sup>2</sup> See page 102.



REGINALD SASOON



prodigious, and to his great joy he was elected to the National Hunt Committee, the body which governs racing over fences and hurdles. It was long since there had been so generous a supporter of racing in England under National Hunt rules.

It was his ambition to ride a Grand National winner, and he bought (as he could well afford to do) more than one steeplechaser with that in mind. Racing men said that, if he won the race, the public would be so delighted that they would burn down the stands out of sheer joy. At one time, he thought that he had a possible winner for it in West Indies, a splendid horse on which he won over part of the Aintree course (much to the surprise of the connoisseurs, who did not anticipate that horse and rider would keep company throughout the race). Before the Grand National, she fell and broke her neck. "Reggie" Sassoon met with a similar end. In January 1933, while taking part in a steeplechase at Lingfield, he fell and sustained severe injuries. He was rushed to a London nursing-home, but a few days later he died. A race was instituted by his friends in his memory. English sport mourned the loss of a gallant English gentleman, whom anti-Semites would have called a dirty Oriental Jew.

The light-hearted Reginald was Meyer Sassoon's only son. He had, however, a daughter as well, Violet Leah, who in 1917 married Derek Barrington Fitzgerald, only son of the Hon. Eustace Robert Southwell Fitzgerald, who in turn was fifth son of Baron Fitzgerald, a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary from 1882 to 1889. (This was, of course, a life

peerage.<sup>1</sup>) This was by no means the only instance of a Sassoon marriage into the British aristocracy—there had been a particularly notable instance four years previous, with which we shall deal later. But it is particularly significant, for this reason. The German anti-Semitic thesis is that intermarriage extends the influence of the Jew. But the truth is precisely the reverse; it diminishes it. Meyer Elias Sassoon's interest in the great business built up by his pious father passed out of Jewish hands in consequence of his son's death and his daughter's marriage. (It is a process paralleled by what has happened to many other business houses established by Jews in the last century, still bearing Jewish names, which are erroneously considered to be Jewish in management and to advance what are mysteriously designated as "Jewish" interests.) To-day, Captain Derek Barrington Fitzgerald is a considerable figure in the City of London—the man at the head of the various E. D. Sassoon interests in England, a director of E. D. Sassoon & Company, Limited, of the E. D. Sassoon Banking Company, Limited, of the British Burma Petroleum Company and of the Eastern Bank. The Sassoon genius has turned to the advantage of the Irishman—and why not?

The only member of the Sassoon family in the fourth generation whose prominence is due pre-eminently to the pragmatic activities generally associated with the family is Sir Ellice Victor

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that Sir Maurice Fitzgerald, the second Baronet and twentieth Knight of Kerry, also married a Jewess—Amelia Catherine, daughter of Henri Louis Bischoffsheim; the two families have however no immediate connexion.

Sassoon, the third holder of the Bombay baronetcy, elder son and heir of Sir Edward Elias Sassoon. The latter, as we have seen, settled in England, and his son (who had the high originality, for a Sassoon, to be born in Naples) had the conventional English upbringing—Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge (even in their schools and universities, the progeny of Elias David Sassoon had to keep their own tack; the main line of the family went to Eton and Oxford!). He was an aeronautical enthusiast almost before he left the University, and in June 1912 was one of the competitors in the Grand Prix of the Aero Club of France. It was thus natural for him to serve in the Royal Flying Corps during the war of 1914–18, receiving a wound that left a permanent trace, and ending with the rank of Captain. In 1924, he succeeded his father, not only in the Bombay baronetcy but also in the Chairmanship of the family businesses, which henceforth absorbed him. He became a great figure in Indian industry, like his father and grandfather before him, followed the family tradition as lay head of Indian Jewry, and worked manfully and travelled strenuously and widely to help to find a refuge for the refugees from Nazi tyranny in those tragic years after 1933; was a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1922–3 and again from 1926 to 1929, was Member of the Royal Commission for the Investigation of Labour Conditions in the Dominion in 1929; and incidentally owned the biggest horse-racing establishment in the East. After the death of Sir Philip Sassoon in 1939, his second cousin, Sir Victor, son of a younger son of a younger son, a member of the

rival firm, and even holder of a junior baronetcy, became the nominal head of the Sassoon family.

The policy of the house underwent in this period a radical change, the main tendencies being first to reduce its Indian commitments and secondly to expand its banking, as distinct from its trading business. In 1920, as has been pointed out, the firm of E. D. Sassoon & Company, Merchants and Bankers (to be distinguished carefully from the parent business of David Sassoon & Company) had been incorporated in India as a private limited company, with a capital of 1,000,000 rupees. (This was at the time when Sir Edward Elias Sassoon, who unlike his elder brother Jacob found his interests centred in London, was at the head of the firm.) A more radical step was taken in 1930, when the E. D. Sassoon Banking Company, Limited, was formed and registered at Hong Kong, with a capital of £1,000,000 in 100,000 £10 shares, all of which were issued though 10s. only was paid up at the time (subsequently, the amount called up was raised to £5 per share). This new organization acquired the banking interests of E. D. Sassoon & Company in London, Manchester and Hong Kong, and later those in Shanghai as well. Of the former, the mercantile house, Derek Barrington Fitzgerald, Meyer Sassoon's son-in-law, is the principal director: of the latter, the Banking Company, Sir Ellice Victor Sassoon is the Governing Director and Chairman, while Derek Fitzgerald is one of the London managers.

Almost simultaneously with this development, the ordinary trading business of the firm in London,

Manchester and Hong Kong was transferred to an associated concern, Arnhold & Company, Limited. Messrs. E. D. Sassoon had acquired a considerable interest in this firm in 1923, when a new company was formed and incorporated in China under this name to take over the business of the old-established house of Arnhold, Brothers & Company, Limited (formerly Arnhold, Karberg & Company), in China, London and New York. Eventually, the Sassoon firm obtained complete control of this business, whose Head Office is at Shanghai (it has branches at Hankow, Tientsin, Peking, Hong Kong, Canton, Mukden, etc., as well as in London and New York). At the time of the reorganization of the E. D. Sassoon interests, it was arranged that their branches in England and in the British possessions in the Far East should henceforth trade under that name. The closeness of the relations between the two businesses is demonstrated by the fact that their London offices are to-day in the same building, and that Captain Derek Fitzgerald sits on the board of the subordinate company and is one of the two London managers. Its activities in China relate mainly to the import of machinery into the country and the management of various subsidiary local firms: in Manchester on the other hand it is principally engaged in the raw cotton business and the export of mill-supplies for the E. D. Sassoon Cotton Mills in India.

The developments that have been described implied first the ostensible (though only ostensible) withdrawal of the firm of Elias David Sassoon & Company, after October 1st, 1930, from the trading



activities that it had been carrying on in England and Hong Kong during the past half-century (which however continued to be transacted at the same addresses and without any real change of direction or control by the associated company): and, secondly, the creation of a new Eastern Bank bearing the firm's name and enjoying the advantage of its long-standing connexions with every part of the Far East.

The mercantile and manufacturing interests of the original business in India were as yet unaffected. But, before long, political and other conditions made it seem imperative for the firm to reconsider its line of conduct here too. The *Swaraj* policy, under the auspices of Mahatma Gandhi, had radically altered the Indian economic perspective. Whereas previously the stranger who set up his business or factory in India was considered to be developing the country, henceforth he was alleged to be guilty of exploiting it: and labour conditions, in consequence, became more and more difficult. In addition, there was an increasing difficulty in competing with native Indian firms with relatively small overhead charges and negligible commitments. In October 1931 there was consternation in the business world of Bombay when it was heard that Sir Victor Sassoon, head of the famous firm, had left for the Far East with the intention of transferring the principal seat of his trading and manufacturing activities to China. He denied the report half-heartedly. China, he said, was returning to a greater equilibrium after the long period of disturbance through which it had passed, and the time was coming when it would be possible to open up business with the country again. On the

other hand, political circumstances in India and the constant disturbances which in his opinion were to be envisaged under *Swaraj* made new enterprise there difficult if not impossible. It was not hence (he inferred) a question of transferring established enterprises but rather of reducing new commitments. In fact, the reports proved accurate enough in the long run, for the interests at Bombay, to which the firm of E. D. Sassoon & Company owed its reputation and prosperity in the first instance, have now been removed to a great extent to China. It was a drastic step—and, in view of present conditions, the observer might wonder whether it was altogether a happy one. There were, however, compensations, due probably to good fortune rather than to foresight. In 1935, Messrs. Elias David Sassoon & Company determined to withdraw from the produce business in China. Accordingly, they came to an agreement with their associated firm of Arnhold & Company whereby the latter formed a new and entirely independent concern, the capital of which was subscribed partly by them, partly by their old staff and associates, and partly by the important insurance and trading house of Bowring, Jones & Tidy, Limited, of London. The new business adopted the name of the Arnhold Trading Company, Limited. It took over, as a going concern, the produce business of Arnhold & Company—i.e., that on which Elias David Sassoon had established his fortune. The head office is at Shanghai: it has branches at London (in Creechurch Lane), Hankow and Hong Kong, and there are subsidiary companies at Tientsin (under the style, The Tientsin-

Anlee Export Company, Limited) and New York (there known as Arnhold & Company, Incorporated). But, though the business that it contracts is to a large extent that which in the first instance was established by Elias David Sassoon, the Sassoons have only a minority holding in it.

In India too what once constituted a source of apparently inexhaustible wealth is at present passing through a serious crisis. It is some years since the E. D. Sassoon United Mills, with their capital of 20,000,000 rupees and controlling their thousands of looms and hundreds of thousands of spindles, last paid a dividend, and the ordinary 10-rupee shares are quoted at *nil* on the Bombay Stock Exchange list. (An almost incredibly large number of the other Bombay mills have shown themselves equally unprofitable during the past few years. It should be a comforting, though perhaps perplexing, consideration to the Lancashire mill-owners, who have long considered their misfortunes to be due mainly to Indian competition.) The principal direct interest of this branch of the Sassoon family to-day is, then, the comparatively new banking house, established as a separate concern as recently as 1930. Its head, Sir Victor Sassoon, is now domiciled in Shanghai, where he subscribed £20,000 to the British War Fund on the outbreak of hostilities in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the extensive ramifications, and radical transformation, of the business established

<sup>1</sup> Sir Victor Sassoon has of course other business interests, being a director of the South British Insurance Company (London Board) and at one time also of the Power Investment Corporation.

by Elias David Sassoon is almost bewilderingly complicated. The parent house of David Sassoon & Company has had a less involved and less adventurous existence, still following conservatively in the path marked out for it by the founder and his eldest son. The reason for this is possibly that the heads of the family, after the second generation, have had wider interests, political and personal, which, moreover, kept them quasi-permanently in Europe.

The brilliant social tradition of the Sassoons of Edwardian days was continued in Georgian England pre-eminently by the son and daughter of the eldest surviving son of the eldest son, Philip Albert Gustave David, the third Baronet of Kensington Gore and Eastern Terrace, Brighton, and Sybil Rachel Bettie Cécile. They were heirs to the abilities as well as to the fortunes of two outstanding families. In her case, the beauty of the women of the Rothschild family, among whom her mother had been pre-eminent, was diversified by an exotic strain which gave it an individual quality, and made it possible for her to be spoken of as the most beautiful woman in English society. "Sybil," once said Sargent, who painted and drew her repeatedly, "Sybil is lovely. Some days she is positively green."

Brother and sister, left alone in the world when he was twenty-four years of age and she eighteen, lived together, in obedience to their parents' express wish—but not for long. Even in days when sectarian loyalties were stronger by far than they are in the twentieth century, matches between Jewish heiresses and scions of the British aristocracy had been

relatively common, with the result that not many English families of older vintage are to-day free from some such admixture or alliance. (It is enough to mention those of the Dukes of Norfolk, of Roxburghe, of St. Albans and of Wellington, the Earls of Orkney, Derby, Rosebery, Crawford and Southampton, the Marquesses of Mountbatten, of Crewe and of Salisbury, Viscounts Halifax and Galway, Lord Saye and Sele, Lord Grey de Ruthyn, Lord Auckland, Lord Sherborne and Lord St. Davids, to show the extent of this process. How the Jews can be accused of being "unassimilable," in the face of all this evidence, passes understanding. On analysis, the accusation boils down to the rather absurd truism that those Jews who have not assimilated are still distinguishable as Jews—but, in view of the fact that for centuries their numbers remained constant, and in some cases even decreased, these are probably a small minority.)

It was in this process of natural selection that Sybil Sassoon met, approved, was approved by, and ultimately married George Horatio Charles Cholmondeley, Earl of Rocksavage, eldest son and heir of the fourth Marquess of Cholmondeley (to whose title he subsequently succeeded, in 1923). His father was Joint Hereditary Great Chamberlain of England, and could trace his descent back to William the Belward, lord of a moiety of the Barony of Malpas, in the twelfth century. It was a descent less noble by objective criteria than that from the *Nasi* of the Jews in Iraq. Nevertheless, the wedding ceremony took place, on August 6th, 1913, in the strictest privacy, at the registry office in Prince's Row,

Buckingham Palace Road. The bridegroom was accompanied by his father; on the bride's side, only her brother and one or two other members of the family were present.

On the day of the wedding, scientific observers might have discerned slight seismological disturbances in different parts of the earth's surface, for the pious founders of both families had turned in their graves. To-day, the heir-presumptive to the Marquessate of Cholmondeley and to the office of Lord Great Chamberlain of England is a great-great-great-grandson of a Prince of the Captivity in Baghdad.

## CHAPTER X

P.S.

PHILIP ALBERT GUSTAVE DAVID SASSOON was born with the silver spoon in his mouth overlaid with gold, tipped with iridium and studded with Oriental pearls. He was descended from two of the best-known families of the contemporary world, whose names were famous from, literally, China to Peru. His maternal grandfather was said to have been the saviour of Paris after the Franco-Prussian war, his uncles were the bosom friends of King Edward, his father cut a figure in English politics, his mother had been a Society hostess, the home in which he had been brought up was a hub of intellectual life, and he was heir to a principal interest in one of the greatest businesses in the British Empire.

He came into the world, amid great hopes, in 1888, not long before Sir Albert Sassoon's death, and his name embodied that of both his grandfathers as well as of the founder of the Sassoon family (the "Philip" by which he was generally known was alone an original addition, and its origin is not obvious). It was hardly possible at this stage for the heir to the family hopes and ambitions to have any education other than the semi-conventional one of the English governing class, and Eton and Oxford (where Christ Church had become the family

college) were thus *de rigueur*. His French was, of course, perfect—his Parisian mother saw to that. He was later sent over to Munich one summer to study German, lodging with the same impecunious Baron as the present Earl of Durham, then the Hon. John Frederick Lambton, who was intended for the diplomatic service. Sassoon was then at the height of the ebullience of his youth, the life of every party or expedition, always clamouring for something fresh to do or some new place to visit, and proved a disturbing house-mate for his stolid Anglo-Saxon companion. There was one occasion when he danced with one of his girl friends on the platform in front of the Feldernhalle at Munich (a mock Loggia dei Lanzi, absurdly adorned with statues of Tilly and Wrede, and at present a Nazi sanctuary) before the eyes of the heavy and, as yet, partially sane Bavarian burghers, in the end kicking off his hat and playing football with it round the square. When he left, he sent back from Paris, disdaining his mother's assistance in making his choice, a green silk petticoat as a present for Gertrude Atherton, the middle-aged American novelist of whom he had seen a great deal during his stay, and two immense artificial roses for her attractive niece.

He was only twenty-one when his mother died in 1909, commending her children to the care of her friends, and three years later he lost his father. In his will, Sir Edward expressed the hope that his son would do something to maintain his connexion with the constituency that he had represented for the past thirteen years in Parliament. The hint was



obvious: and, in accordance with the rather ludicrous hereditary system that has been foisted upon English politics, Sir Philip Sassoon, third Baronet (but first born in England), entered the House of Commons at the age of twenty-three as Member for the Hythe Division of Kent, having been elected by a majority of some 1,700 over the Liberal candidate. (It was a very handsome margin in the then small electorate.) He continued to represent the constituency without interruption until his death, upwards of a quarter of a century later, the semi-jubilee of the connexion being lavishly celebrated in due course. He was already at this time a Lieutenant in the East Kent Yeomanry, in which he subsequently rose to the rank of Major, and was staunchly Anglo-Indian in choosing polo as his favourite pastime. His family associations stood him in good stead in public life. There was at least one of his Rothschild kinsmen in the House: Mrs Asquith, the Prime Minister's wife and his mother's close friend, remembered her promise to the latter on her death-bed, considered him a rare artist as well as the best of friends and companions, went to the Variétés with him in Paris and continued the acquaintance at home. When he made his maiden speech at Westminster, friends on both sides of the House listened anxiously and were themselves made to feel nervous by his palpable diffidence.

The outbreak in 1914 of the first war against German bestiality suddenly revolutionized his life, as it did that of all the young Englishmen of his generation. He already held a commission in the Yeomanry and in due course went to the Front and

became one of Lord French's aides-de-camp. After serving for a time in this capacity, in December 1915 he was chosen by Sir Douglas Haig, the new Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France, as his military private secretary. It was an eminently sensible choice, if only because his familiarity with the French language and with French life made it possible for him to break down so easily the barriers of reserve which divided the French and English military commands. The General Headquarters were more comfortable than the trenches, but fell a long way short of Park Lane standards of comfort. When Colonel Repington was paying one of his extraordinary visits of inspection to the Front in the autumn of 1917, he found them at Blendecques (near St. Omer), and Sir Philip Sassoon, the young sybarite of former days, accommodated in a quaint little hut in the garden, small and chilly, with only an electric radiator to relieve the ardours of the climate. Nevertheless, he was able to introduce at least a touch of his own lucullan tastes into the somewhat austere military atmosphere, and those who dined with the Commander-in-Chief were occasionally regaled through his efforts on *recherché* luxuries of a type hardly common in an army mess.

It was interesting and varied work that fell to his lot. He had occasion to meet almost everybody who mattered in English public life, sometimes on the most intimate and unconventional terms. After that memorable occasion when F. E. Smith, the later Lord Birkenhead, was placed under arrest, it was Sassoon who was sent by Haig to invite him to lunch

in order to mollify him: and, since the other was still towering with rage and completely unapproachable, he was kept trotting backwards and forwards all the morning, with fresh supplies of oil to pour on the troubled waters, until at last he succeeded in calming them. From time to time, he went to London on missions which brought him in close touch with men like Lord Northcliffe (to whom he expressed the G.H.Q. view that victory was possible only if the divisions diverted to the Balkan side-show were brought back to wallow in French mud, or with the Prime Minister himself. Lord Esher, sitting at the hub of the inner circle of English politics, wrote to him confidentially about the need for erecting a barbed-wire entanglement, proof against the subtle propaganda at work in Westminster and elsewhere, around the fort held by Kitchener, Robertson, and the Commander-in-Chief.

He met, too, in his secretarial capacity some of the best known figures in France, including the late Commander of the French forces:

Easter Sunday, 1917.

I went to Paris last week and went to look up poor old Joffre. He sits at the Ecole de Guerre every morning with, I fear, but little to do, and his anteroom had but one occupant—and in a bowler at that—and his table only boasted a ruler and a piece of virgin blotting-paper! But he was superbly shaved (in the old days he always had a white fur on his chin) and his sleeves outvied the milky way for stars.

He was even able to turn his artistic tastes and connexions to good use. The German High

Command had set the example of sending prominent artists to the Front to record the war-scene on canvas, or in crayon. By now, some of their English counterparts and others, such as William Rothenstein, were pressing for this example to be followed. It was a long time before the attempt was successful, and when it was Rothenstein thanked Northcliffe. The press magnate disclaimed all credit. "The carrying out of your scheme as to artists was very little helped by me," he said. "I spoke of it at G.H.Q., but it was carried through by young Philip Sassoon."

The most eminent of the artists who were sent to France under this scheme was John Sargent, the old friend and recorder of the Sassoon family. His mission was much to the taste of Philip, who took him under his wing (such as it was), did everything possible to help him, and accompanied him when Major Uzielli (member, incidentally, of a military family of the same "racial" origin as the Sassoons), took him for a joy-ride, interesting but exquisitely uncomfortable, up and down slopes in a primitive tank. When the artist went to G.H.Q., as Haig's guest, Sassoon was, of course, there, and had the opportunity of initiating him into the mysteries of the military hierarchy. There were some superb moments when the two great men met. Sassoon was privileged to be present at one, when Haig was inspecting the wonderful painting of British troops going up the line by rail in the dusk. "I see; one of our light railways," the unimaginative Commander-in-Chief commented, after a few minutes' close examination. Later on, Sassoon used to tell of the conversations between the soldier and the artist,

which were unique of their kind. "Sargent cannot begin his sentences and starts in the middle with a wave of the hand for beginning," he said. "Haig cannot finish his and often concludes with hand-work instead of words. A meeting between the two was quite amusing—a series of little pantomimes."

Though he was privileged to have a safe view (as it were, from the stage box) of what was happening, war was completely repugnant to Philip Sassoon's sophisticated mentality—that of an intensely civilized human being:

February 1st, 1917.

Would one ever have believed before the war that one could have stood for one *single instant* the load of pain and anxiety which is now one's daily breath? I find that although I can study the casualty list without ever seeing a name I know—for *all* my friends have been killed—yet nevertheless one feels as much for others as for oneself—just a blur of grief: and one wakes every morning feeling one can hardly bear to live through the day. Yet these splendid fellows out here set an example of happiness that one follows in spite of one's heart.

It was almost in the spirit of his kinsman, Siegfried Sassoon. But Philip was hardly desirous of identifying himself with the latter, especially after his "joke" of sending the Commander-in-Chief his *Old Huntsman*, including his virulent poems on the war. He indignantly repudiated the relationship, in fact, though they were indubitably and notoriously second cousins, both being great-grandsons of old David Sassoon of Baghdad.

At length (not without false anticipations—"Isn't it heartening America coming in? I do see the end of the war for this year quite certainly," he had written from G.H.Q. in the spring of 1917) the nightmare began to lift. In July 1918 he was in England on leave, but was laid low with the all but universal disease of Spanish 'Flu, which is said to have caused more casualties than the battlefield. When he returned to France, the smashing Allied victories (initiated by the Australians under the Jewish General, Sir John Monash) had put a completely different face on the fortunes of war. It was no more than a few months since the Germans had achieved what was until that date perhaps the most brilliant military success since the campaigns of Napoleon. They were in almost complete possession of Belgium, as well as the richest part of France. There was barely a single enemy soldier on German soil, save as a prisoner of war. (It is worth while to recall those circumstances to-day, when the struggle ahead of us appears to be so grim and unending.) But they were broken in a single protracted battle:

October 23rd, 1918.

Everything is going well. The despised British have taken 89,000 prisoners to their own cheek since the beginning of August. Not a bad little bite out of the Boche reserves? The end of the war does not seem so much like a mirage as it used to—but if we are to have the peace we must have, I don't think it can—or ought to—be for this year . . . I have got my great friend Sargent out here and see him constantly; he is doing wonderful things of the war.

Complete victory—not, unhappily, pressed to

its logical conclusion, as it should have been—was nearer than anyone dared to hope even then. In little more than a fortnight from that day the Armistice had been signed and the butchery was ended:

November 30th, 1918.

There has been too much in this year for *one* year: it will take the shine out of those to come. I feel no exhilaration at the idea of peace—I don't know why.

There was still much work to be done before he could resume normal life ("I have been snowed under with my own work and Douglas Haig's," he wrote from London on January 5th, 1919, "and am returning to France with him to-morrow"). But at last the interlude of khaki came to an end:

February 23rd, 1919.

I am demobilising on March 1st—but with rather a heavy heart . . . and yet there is something corpse-like about G.H.Q. now—the ashes of last night's fire . . . If it had not been for the sickening consciousness of casualties, I should have been very happy during the war—soldiers are so delightful, and hard work a continual interest, and away from all the rumours and intrigues of the Home Front.

In the Jingo Election held shortly after the Armistice, the Commander-in-Chief's Private Secretary was given every facility to offer himself for re-election at his old constituency as a Coalition Unionist candidate, with Lloyd George's benediction. He was returned by a majority of more than 5,000 over his Labour opponent in a much-increased

electorate, and thereafter was generally unopposed. Even though the outcome was hardly in question the interruption was unwelcome. "I am overworked and now have to go over for this damned election. I shan't be human till it is over," he wrote, on November 20th, 1918. And the fruits of victory were not, after all, so enticing—"I shall certainly not be happy in peace," he prognosticated.

So demobilization came to a Philip Sassoon who had been thrice mentioned in dispatches, in laudatory terms, by the grateful Commander-in-Chief as one "by whose loyal and devoted assistance a great burden of work has been lifted from my shoulders." Like many others who served behind the line, he could decorate his breast with a polychrome assembly of distinction, such as the insignia of an Officer of the French Order of the Black Star, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, an Officer of the Order of the Crown of Belgium, and holder of both the French and Belgian Military Crosses and of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

He was now in his thirty-second year: a slim, restless figure of medium height with a lean, pale face, rather serious, but with a slight touch of aristocratic indolence. In his physique, however, the swarthy heritage of David Sassoon, though not his commanding height, was clearly discernible. Men spoke of him (probably with only approximate truth) as the wealthiest bachelor in England. His mother had left nearly a quarter of a million pounds: his father rather more than £1,000,000; and from time to time in his life other relatives—his Rothschild



grandfather, a Sassoon cousin<sup>1</sup>—bequeathed him sums which for any ordinary man would have been considered fortunes, with the result that though he never “made” money he was worth nearly twice as much as his father at the time of his death. Moreover, there was the great mansion in Park Lane, now filled with art treasures inherited by him and his sister from their grandfather, Gustave de Rothschild, the country seat at Trent Park (the house at Sandgate and the shooting lodge in Scotland were not retained for long), and two resplendent residences in India, Sans Souci and Garden Reach, which he continued to own (though he never occupied them) until the nineteen-twenties. There was every material and intellectual basis for a great career.

The beginning was auspicious. The advantages of the contacts made as Private Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief in France soon became apparent. In 1919, not long after his demobilization, Sassoon was made Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Transport. From that period to his death, twenty years later, he was continuously in office, in one capacity or the other, except from 1922 to 1924, after the disruption of the Coalition Government, and during the two brief interludes of Labour administration. He enjoys the distinction of never having accepted any salary in these employments. It is, of course, true that he could afford to dispense with it; yet other men, as fortunately

<sup>1</sup> E.g., David Sassoon, Reuben's son, who left him £150,000 and a holding in David Sassoon and Company equal to what he already possessed.

situated in this respect, were less considerate of the public purse.

At the Ministry of Transport, indeed, his work was not very momentous. But it served as a stepping-stone to employment more interesting by far and at the very hub of political life, which gave his special faculties their outlet. In 1920 he was appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, whose philo-Semitism was such that to be a Jew was in itself a recommendation to him: and he continued to serve him in this capacity for two eventful years, accompanying him to a long series of international conferences held in all manner of pleasant places overseas, and receiving an insight into the political game that few other people could aspire to.

For some reason, the house that his father had occupied at Sandgate made no appeal to him, and some time previously he had purchased a site at Lympne, on the border of Kent and Sussex, near the ruins of the old castle overlooking the wide sweep of Romney Marsh. Here he had a house built according to the designs of Philip Armstrong Tilden (who specialized in work for affluent politicians) round the nucleus of an old barn, not large but extremely comfortable and exquisitely appointed. The architecture was vaguely Spanish, but the flower-grown terraces helped it to blend into the surrounding landscape without any touch of discordance. A long flight of marble steps, at one time flanked at the top by two figures which he called Pericles and Constantine, led down the cliff-side to the sea. There was difficulty about finding a name for

the house. He consulted his literary friends, and passed in review a large number of suggestions, finally deciding on "Port Lympne." He described the site, so English in its undramatic loveliness, in words that revealed the artist:

July 17th, 1918.

I am on the lip of the world, and gaze over the wide Pontine marches that reflect the passing clouds like a mirror. The sea is just far enough off to be always smooth and blue—and everywhere the acute stillness that comes from great distances. How altruistic nature is! And this year the wild rampage of colour seems to be on tiptoe to soothe one's wrenched heart.

For the next two years, this isolated retreat, almost simple by Sassoon or Rothschild standards, was greatly in the public eye. It was natural for the Prime Minister to seek relaxation from the cares of office in his Parliamentary Private Secretary's comfortable seaside house—easy of access from London, close to the ports of embarkation for the Continent and, above all, with admirable golf-courses near at hand to tempt unwary Latin statesmen to their doom. It seemed the ideal spot too for meeting French and other foreign representatives, with a minimum of publicity or of trouble for either side. As a result, several important conferences of this period took place there with Sir Philip Sassoon playing the host in inimitable fashion. One of the most significant was that of May 1920 when the question of Reparations was among those under discussion. On this occasion Lloyd George and Austen Chamberlain represented Great Britain, and Miller-

and and Marasal (the French Minister of Commerce) France, while Lord Riddell was in attendance for publicity purposes, busily taking mental notes. In the following month there was another, to which Marshal Foch, General Weygand, Sir Henry Wilson, and M. Venizelos were summoned in order to discuss the Turkish situation.

Port Lympne, during the gatherings, presented a curious spectacle. In one room, the chiefs sat in conference and a cloud of tobacco-smoke: in another, subordinate officials discussed such details as were left to them: in the third, the various secretaries worked amid a clattering of typewriters: in a fourth, tea was laid out on a grand scale, with cakes, fruit and every delicacy. Meanwhile a sumptuous dinner was being prepared in the kitchen by the French *chefs*. Towards evening, when the dining-room was cleared, in readiness for resuming its proper function, the smaller fry were relegated to the entrance hall, where they stood about watching the mist roll up and cover the marshes. Meanwhile the swarthy, restless host was flitting about from room to room and person to person, like a bee in search of honey. His sister, Lady Rocksavage, would act as hostess on these occasions: and their command of French made it possible for them to keep up the conversation with all sections of the monolingual Occidentals brought together under their roof by the tragic game of international politics.

Besides these formal gatherings there was informal entertainment, when the guests were sometimes even more illustrious though less cosmopolitan. In February 1921 the Prime Minister, Lord French

and Lord Riddell were entertained at a week-end party, Sir Robert Horne coming down on the Monday to accept nomination for the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. A month later, there was a distinguished gathering over Easter, including once more the Prime Minister, with Lady Ribblesdale, Mr and Mrs Dudley Ward and several others. On Easter Sunday, the host accompanied his chief to service at a local Baptist chapel (it was some time, incidentally, since he had been seen in a synagogue). In the afternoon, the Prince of Wales came down by car from Windsor, staying until after dinner, when he motored back again. The entertainment was always on a most lavish scale, and the cooking exquisite; while, before this had become a commonplace in private houses, a cinema-show (partly a concession to the incorrigible tastes of the Prime Minister) often concluded the evening.

These entertainments did not, of course, pass without comment. A caricature of 1921 shows an intensely semitic Sir Philip Sassoon pulling the strings that work a puppet Lloyd George, with a suspiciously bucolic accompanying rhyme:

Sometimes, when evening shadows fall,  
I sit and smoke on Dymchurch wall,  
Or walk across the marsh to Lympne,  
And muse upon the likes of him. . . .

I sit and smoke on Dymchurch wall  
And cannot understand at all  
Why legislators, when at Lympne,  
Make such an awful fuss of him!

On the fall of the Coalition Government, in October 1922, Sassoon, though rewarded for his



PORT LYMPNE  
(RESIDENCE OF SIR PHILIP SASOON)



services with the Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (G.B.E.), suffered the penalty which a favourite of the former Prime Minister could expect, and for two years was in the wilderness. But, when Stanley Baldwin formed his second Government in 1924, he became Under-Secretary of State for Air under Sir Samuel Hoare. He retained this post until the Conservative administration came to an end in 1929, and held it again in both the first and second National Governments, from 1931 to 1937, first under Lord Londonderry and then under Lord Swinton, during the whole of which period he represented the Ministry in the House of Commons. "Of course you ought to have written *at once* to congratulate me on becoming a Minister!" he had written, "I am enraptured with my job." It was an unexpected appointment, for he had the qualification, not so usual in those days, of considerable flying experience and a firm belief in air-power. This began in 1918, when he flew back from England to the G.H.Q. in forty minutes. "It was wonderful," he recorded, "and sickens one of every other means of locomotion." Thereafter, he had his own 'plane and landing-ground at Port Lympne, and often used his private machine to fulfil engagements about the country.

He took his duties more seriously than many of his predecessors. While he was in office, he made one journey after the other by air, covering thousands of miles, to many parts of the Empire and various European countries, obtaining first-hand acquaintance with the problems that he had to administer from Whitehall. It was the sort of trip which well



accorded with his restless temperament, seldom allowing him to sleep in one place on two successive nights.

Of these, the most significant was in the autumn of 1929, when he considered it his duty to accompany the R.A.F. machine that made a survey of the route from England to India, in anticipation of the opening of the regular passenger service by the Imperial Airways, bringing Bombay within five days of London. It was not, strictly speaking, a pioneer flight—Sir Samuel and Lady Hoare had covered the route before: but it was the first time that the task was performed methodically. At the same time, the Under-Secretary of State for Air was to carry out the first general inspection of the British air-stations overseas to be effected entirely by air transport. Speed was essential, as he had to be back in London for the reopening of Parliament. "I start at dawn Saturday from Plymouth Hoe," he wrote just before he set out, "and shall hope to accomplish my 17,000 miles in five weeks without becoming a stretcher case. I am glad to be eking out this perfect summer in the deserts of Arabia and the sizzling plains of India."

The flight was not completed quite according to plan, taking in fact six weeks instead of five; but the programme was adhered to faithfully enough, and the delays were due to nothing untoward. On the morning of September 28th, the Under-Secretary for Air left Paddington, suffering from a raging fever due to incipient croup (this had not been anticipated when the plans were so carefully prepared) and on the following morning took off with his party from

Castlewater, the Naval base on Plymouth Sound, on the flying-boat *Iris II*. Thence they crossed direct to France, and followed the French coast to the Etang d'Hourtin, where they stopped to refuel, thence cutting across to the Etang de Berre, near Marseilles, where they passed the night. The second night was spent at Naples, the third at Athens, and the fourth at Cairo. Here the flying-boat and the Minister parted company: the former to conduct experimental cruises in the Eastern Mediterranean and then go to India by way of the Persian Gulf, and the latter to pay various routine visits of inspection in Egypt and the Sudan before leaving in a land machine, a week later, on the next stage of his journey. He flew over Palestine and the Syrian desert to Iraq, arriving at Baghdad on October 11th. Thence he went on, the next day, to Basra and then by way of Bushire to Karachi. After spending some days in visiting the R.A.F. stations in India and being the guest of the Viceroy for a brief visit at Simla (where he ate a mango, apparently without realizing that his family had first familiarized that fruit in England, and did some extremely superior shopping), he left by the same mode of locomotion and returned to England, a week later than had been planned, on November 13th. During the six and a half weeks he had been absent, he had traversed 16,700 miles. Perhaps his most remarkable experience in the course of the trip was at Miramshah, where he made the acquaintance of one Aircraftsman Shaw, better remembered as T. E. Lawrence, then serving with the Number 60 Squadron of the Royal Air Force. (He was shortly after to be removed,

in view of the troubles in Afghanistan, so as to avoid the inevitable comment that always followed his suspiciously simple personality about the world.) The two had a long talk and began a close friendship, which continued, incongruously, in England, in the hispanic setting of Lympne.<sup>1</sup> "If only you and I and Philip were alone, what fun we'd have," Lawrence is credibly reported to have said there one day to a common friend.

In 1934, Sassoon carried out another great tour of inspection by air from London to Singapore and back. This time, he visited either in Imperial Airways or R.A.F. machines scores of stations in Egypt, the North-west Frontier of India and far beyond to the East, and by the time he returned had flown over fourteen countries, covered all told more than 19,000 miles and had been in the air for 180 hours.

When in the course of the 1928 tour the Under-Secretary of State for Air was flying from Baghdad to Basra, did he, one wonders, see plodding along in the desert beneath him a tall, bearded Jew, muffled to escape recognition, in flight from the tyranny of the Pasha, his master, together with his old father of nearly eighty years? As he was piloted high above the earth, a Minister of the British Crown, with every comfort and amenity of the twentieth century and all the deference due to a politician in office who is at the same time a millionaire, did he think of the perilous journey a hundred years before, over precisely the same ground, of his

<sup>1</sup> There is a somewhat bald appreciation of Lawrence by Sir Philip Sassoon in *T. E. Lawrence by his Friends*, the volume of tributes published after his death.

great-grandfather, David Sassoon, founder of his family and of his fortune, taking thirteen painful years for the journey he completed in three days? It is more than dubious. He wrote indeed, an account of the trip, under the title, *The Third Route* (the former two between Europe and India, according to this symmetrical but not quite accurate scheme, being (1) that discovered by Vasco da Gama in 1497, and (2) that made available by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869). It was an admirable literary achievement (one chapter-heading bears the stamp of genius: "Plane Tales from the Hills") and a distinct public success; but there was nothing in it to indicate that the author or his forebears had any direct personal interest in certain of the countries that he had visited. "I must revise my opinion of Baghdad," he airily wrote. "Parts of it certainly are rather dirty, and with the exception of the mosques there are few buildings which repay a second glance: but it preserves the atmosphere of days long past." It was hardly the way to speak of the cradle of one's family in the not-very-remote past. But nevertheless, the chronicler may remark, even if the hero failed to notice it, the ironical vengeance of history. The successor as ruler of Baghdad of the tyrannical Daoud Pasha (from whom David Sassoon fled in 1829) was King Feisul, who was entertained at dinner at the Residency to meet the Right Honourable Sir Philip David Gustave Sassoon, Bart., M.P., exactly one hundred years later.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is one point in *The Third Route* where the author's detachment is unnecessarily ludicrous. He mentions how when his party was on its way back 'Baron Rothschild very kindly invited us to stay the night at Château Lafitte.' Whether

These were not his only official voyages abroad, some taking him to less remote if more uncivilized areas. In Italy, on the occasion of one of his visits, he was entertained with all the magnificence of which a Fascist government (not yet anti-Semitic—at that period, Mussolini considered racialism to be absurd, and his German counterpart a mere mountebank) was capable, and found the importance of his position generally appreciated at the Vatican as well as the Quirinal and Palazzo Venezia:

I had such a marvellous week in Rome. Flew all over the country in all the Italian machines with all their star pilots—and had private audiences from the Pope, Mussolini and the King—all frightfully interesting in their different way. But the Pope's is much the best *show* and he is really *the* great swell in Rome. He never enjoyed himself more than when I was with him. I think he was so thankful to be with a heathen and not to have to talk *shop*. He was exquisitely dressed in white moiré and sapphires and kept me over an hour—with 50,000 Easter pilgrims waiting to see him pass in front of them. The Swiss Guard are quite the *chicest* thing I have ever seen and all his lacqueys wear old red cut velvet.

These experiences, coupled with a constancy in office unusual in those ministerially volatile days, gave Philip Sassoon particularly high qualifications for his post. He was not indeed an ideal administrator, lacking in patience and being unable to conceal his resentment at delay or disappointment. But he compensated for this by his grasp of detail and

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the host was his uncle or only a cousin, it was hardly an extraordinary display of hospitality.

by the pains he took for obtaining a first-hand acquaintance with conditions. At the end of his period of office, it could be said of him that no ministerial official of his rank had so much knowledge of his subject. The fact was reflected in the speeches which he made in the House of Commons in his ministerial capacity. These showed not only his intimate acquaintance with the subject but also the closeness of his contacts with the men of the flying services throughout the Empire. When (as the representative of his department from the Lower House) it fell to him to introduce the Air Estimates for the year, he utilized this wide background in an admirable manner, giving a vivid picture of the activities, experiences and aspirations of the Air Forces: and his speeches always had the interest which a man who knows his subject invariably conveys.

His association with flying did not stop with his official duties. He did everything in his power to encourage civil aviation: he was made President of the Royal Aeronautical Society on his return from his memorable Far Eastern flight in 1929: he was a member of the Lloyds' Register Aviation Advisory Committee: and he was Honorary Air Commander of the County of London Fighter Squadron of the Auxiliary Air Force. His interest (and this was characteristic of the man) was by no means purely official. His closest friend was an aviator, whose death on a flight to Australia caused him lasting sorrow. At Trent Park, he used to entertain young airmen about to leave for service overseas. Those who were married were asked to bring their wives

and any available children of suitable age; and the latter would leave clutching flimsy pieces of paper which they afterwards discovered to be five pound notes. Every year, moreover, he gave a dinner to the pilots attached to the City of London Squadron at Park Lane, first taking the precaution of removing the more fragile of his art treasures.

It was not his fault, but his misfortune, that his later days at the Air Ministry coincided with a period when the country's military preparations were coming under violent attack from both flanks. In the stormy debates that resulted, when his pioneer work was forgotten and the defects due to a steady and consistent process of Treasury cheese-paring became obvious, he did not show up at his best. But it must be remembered that (as has recently been remarked) the Air Force which to-day is beating Goering's Luftwaffe was not built yesterday or last year, and the Under-Secretary for Air over this long and critical period played his part in laying its foundations on solid ground.

Sassoon's care to submerge any trace of Jewish sentiment in his public life was all but contortionist. Nevertheless, when the Chamberlain administration was formed in 1937 and the key-note of public policy began to be the avoidance of any action that might be resented by the rulers of Germany, it was apparently thought that he was unsuitable for the office he had occupied for so many years, and at the Cabinet reshuffle he was transferred to the post of First Commissioner of Works. It seemed somewhat in the nature of what is gracefully known in America as a demotion, for most politicians regard this office

as nothing better than a stepping-stone to higher things. Somewhat surprisingly, Sassoon (like that very different character, George Lansbury, before him) found it admirably suited to his personality. It was the first time in his public life that his unique gifts had full play. His study of particulars combined with his æsthetic appreciation to give him (as was the case with very few of his predecessors in office) an absorbing interest in the work. He brought to bear on the property of the public the same trained taste and the same devotion to detail that he had lavished on his own homes, and the results were not dissimilar on a scale immeasurably greater. The flowers in the Park, the decorations in the Mall, the trumpeters in Westminster Hall, the liveries and plate at the Foreign Office banquets, the restoration of Downing Street, the elimination of varnish from the Palace of Westminster, all engaged his attention, and his tragically brief tenure of this office was the culmination of his public career.

There was a humanizing as well as an æsthetic tendency in his work. This was exemplified in his steps to secure the provision in the royal parks, at private expense, of improved seats—not for the plutocrats who could afford to recline on canvas but for the simple folk who rested themselves gratis. Within a week of the appearance of the new benches in Hyde Park, the down-and-outs had discovered how to ram folded newspapers between the lathes (the old ones had been too thin for the purpose) and thus recline themselves on the tramp's equivalent of a well-sprung mattress.

Not many people realized that Philip Sassoon's



public life was the fruit of duty leavened with ambition rather than of taste. He was nervous as a public speaker; some of his appearances in the House of Commons were almost as much an ordeal to his audience as to himself; and he was temperamentally unsuited to the rough and tumble of debate. He somewhat resented the calls that office made on his time, and in 1926 complained somewhat petulantly that he had been able to get in only two games of polo in the entire year. The Parliamentary scene appeared to him comic rather than dramatic, and he did not trouble to conceal his opinion of "the House of Commons with those seven hundred mugs to look at—ugh! worse than any prison."<sup>1</sup>

1921

I am here over Christmas and quite *dead beat* after a series of all night sittings in the House of Commons, and there the dawn is not rosy-fingered but yellow-thumbed; and the blue-faced bipeds that throng that academy make me feel like a very old sardine in a very old tin—or a jigsaw puzzle that no one will ever piece together (and just as well, perhaps!)

November 19th, 1928.

At present the House of Commons is still meandering on, and the thick lava flow of legislation is not yet staunchd. . . .

Immurement at Westminster was all the less attractive because the call of the countryside, especially his beloved Lympne, was so insistent:

<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to add that this was written in 1918, before he had tasted the sweets of office, which presumably compensated in part for the bleakness of the outlook.

April 19th, 1921.

I have been having a hellishly busy time and I feel I would like to run off into the country and never see London or Downing Street or the House of Commons again.

18th, 1921.

I am so busy and off to the House of Commons. I would like to settle *for good* in the country and vegetate. How happy I should be! It is such a fallacy to think that one must work to be happy—it is only the idle that know bliss, I am sure.

His affection for the landscape of the flat Kentish coast where he had set up his home was particularly profound, exemplifying perhaps rather than contradicting the attitude of one who approached it with atavistic memories of the sands of Iraq: and he described his feelings sometimes in exquisite language (though the reader may have the uncomfortable feeling that some passages may have been written only for effect, as a stylistic exercise from one literary artist to another).

It is divine here now, in this late sunshine which catches in the still smouldering leaves and persuades the golden carp that summer is still here. . . .

We have been living in an opaque world of sunshine and shimmer—but to-day a thick pelt of swansdown mist reminds us that it is not always summer. . . .

Always the sun shines here, filling every chink with gold leaf and blue shadow, and the merry wind races over the marches pointing at the little fat white sheep and the horizon is hemmed with the wide lawns of the sea. . . .

I was down there this Sunday. The wind was

blowing great guns, flinging the yellow leaves about like confetti, against a hyacinth stretch of sand and sea—pale lawns of the evening in shades of vaporous amethyst.

Even in the days when he was most absorbed in public work, his main interest was in art and the application of art to life. The reader's attention must be called once again to the manner in which his Rothschild heredity triumphed over the Sassoon element. The tradition of the latter family was, as we have seen, profoundly unæsthetic. Sir Edward married in Aline de Rothschild a member of one of the most art-loving of all European families, who in every country of Europe had been famous as collectors, experts, and patrons. And the offspring of this match was the man who perhaps had the most exquisite æsthetic taste of any Englishman of his generation. It expressed itself in his constructions, in his houses, in his gardens, in his furnishing, on his walls, in his decorations. It was not only that, like other men, he loved beauty: it was that he had (his only strong passion, perhaps) a positive hatred of ugliness.

His touch was unerring: and improvements that he carried out in his grounds, which when he gave orders for them appeared fantastic, turned out to be exactly what was wanted, as it was wanted, and where it was wanted. Where he planted the exotic (sometimes at extravagant cost) it melted into the landscape as though it was native to England. The decorations of his Park Lane mansion, for every detail of which he was himself responsible, were in striking contrast to the incurable blatancy of the

Barnato exterior. (The interior had been drastically and expensively remodelled under the direction of Philip Armstrong Tilden, the architect responsible for Port Lympne.) In the rooms which he most used, his taste inclined more and more to the restraint of the style of Louis Seize, and the portraits and silver of eighteenth-century England. But he did not eschew the ultra-modern, provided that it could be made to harmonize with its setting, and his music-room was the most notable work of the Spanish mural painter, Jose Maria Sert, whose work once enlivened those hardy enough to visit the Palace of the League of Nations at Geneva or the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. As for Port Lympne, it was in every way an expression of his own personality in his earlier and more exuberant manner, whether in the design or the gardens or the decorations. "I think you will like the aloof intellectualism of my new Library," he wrote.

He had opportunities on a grander scale at his more conventional country-house, Trent Park, near Barnet, the leasehold of which his father had purchased not long before his death. This mansion and the lovely grounds (opened every year to the public for the benefit of charity) he furnished, decorated, readjusted and improved out of recognition—not with quite the same exotic exuberance as Port Lympne, but in a more mature, more settled style, in keeping with the conversation-pieces by Zoffany and others that adorned the walls. The public, of course, wildly exaggerated his expenditure on the luxuries that most appealed to a Hollywood-trained generation. His bathroom, for instance, was

reported locally to have entailed an expenditure of £20,000: but if that were so he must have been overcharged by some ten thousand per cent.

An invitation to any of these mansions was a privilege because of the opportunity of inspecting the art-treasures with which they were filled. But, like many others, in similar circumstances, he had found initial difficulty as a collector in a rich inheritance, which made it difficult for him to express his own tastes and personality. On his father's death, he inherited what he and his mother had brought together. Moreover, when his grandfather, Gustave de Rothschild, died in 1911, he left him and his sister a good part of his own great collection of furniture and *bijouterie*—snuff-boxes and so on—mostly of the highly decorated style beloved of French amateurs, as well as porcelain, Italian majolica, Dresden china, faience and tapestry. The recipients had the courage to dispose of a large proportion of this by auction shortly after the conclusion of the war of 1914–18, together with Eastern rugs, Chinese carvings and other miscellaneous Orientalia they had inherited from their father. Thus the way was cleared for Philip Sassoon to express his own taste in the decorations and adornments of his home. Later on, in 1924, when he felt more sure of his touch, he disposed of a further selection of his inherited treasures, largely Chinese porcelain and decorative Louis-Seize furniture, together with Græco-Roman antiquities for which he could not now find accommodation.

Thus he acquired, by experience and experiment, a particularly wide and intimate knowledge of

furniture, painting, and craftsmanship, and to the end he was constantly altering, increasing, and rearranging his collection. He considered art above all in its decorative aspect—not isolating the individual specimens and treating them as abstractions, but bringing them into the closest possible relation with the architectural features and appurtenances of the rooms in which they were kept. His extreme absorption in such pursuits was a drain even on his ostensibly bottomless purse, and kept him from being in fact so carelessly affluent as the general public believed. Shortly before his death, he brought back from the Continent some exquisite Gothic panelling for one of his residences—but the price was a drain even on his resources.<sup>1</sup>

In the end, his collection became one of the most notable in private hands in the country. His taste was catholic, though the eighteenth century attracted him particularly as he grew older, and Zoffany was among his favourite artists. The collection included such renowned works of art as *A Reading from Molière*, by Jean François de Troy; two auto-portraits by Gainsborough, one with his wife and child, as well as the same artist's *Sir John Bisco*—one of his finest achievements: *A Portrait of a Lady*, by Louis David, an epitome of temperamental charm, believed to represent Madame Tallien, the wife of the Revolutionary leader, in an expansive mood

<sup>1</sup> As is not always the case in such circumstances, there was comfort in the house as well as æstheticism: a six-legged easy-chair in the library, for example, with a long body gently sloping back, which had been made for Sir Edward Sassoon and was specially copied for presentation to Balfour on his eightieth birthday (it was in it that he died).

after the Terror; Hoppner's *Sir John Beaumont*; Reynolds's *Lady North*; Velasquez's *Philip IV of Spain*; J. B. Perroneau's *Petins Woortman*; and a head of a woman by that remarkable clerical artist of the eighteenth century, who combined with his painting the more delicate art of being Chaplain to the Prince Regent, Matthew William Peters. Sassoon did not have much taste for the moderns, but he made an exception in favour of Sargent, with whom he had been intimate from his boyhood and who had executed portraits of so many members of his family. One room at the Park Lane mansion was devoted entirely to his works—thirteen of them, in oil and water-colour—and on the staircase hung the famous portraits of Lady Sassoon, his mother, and the Marchioness of Cholmondeley, his sister. He was represented too by specimens of his earliest and latest work—*The Wineglasses* (1874) and *The Cathedral of Arras* (1918)—the last a record of the time that the two were in France together at the close of the First World War. Among the tapestries, the most important was a Brussels specimen by I. D. Vos, showing one of Marlborough's battles: but this represented a waning taste, and Sassoon disposed of some very notable specimens, one of them by Audran, probably inherited from his Rothschild grandfather.

His taste and expert knowledge were not, however, used selfishly. It was somewhat of a surprise for the world, as well as a particular delight to him, when Lloyd George, who did not know much about such things, made him a Trustee of the National Gallery in 1921—a responsibility seldom attained by

any person of less than sexagenarian status. But it was one of L.G.'s more successful appointments, Sassoon proved a most useful addition to the Board, on which he continued to sit with a short break until the end of his life: and in 1932 he succeeded Lord Lee of Fareham as Chairman of the Trustees. He was also a trustee of the sister-collections—the Wallace Collection and the Tate Gallery as well as of the British School in Rome; and he brought to them all his enthusiasm, expert knowledge, and taste, as well as his quickness of apprehension and of decision. Moreover, his enthusiasm was able to infect wider circles. Year by year he and his vivacious cousin, Mrs David Gubbay, organized loan-exhibitions at his house in Park Lane, for the benefit of the Royal Northern Hospital, of which he was Chairman. European porcelain, silver, "conversation-pieces," the works of Gainsborough, those of Reynolds (on each one of which he was an expert) all had their turn successively. They were models of organization and of arrangement (their widespread imitation later on proved their success and the soundness of the conception), and in the result they not only benefited the funds of the institution but also did a good deal to widen the range of public interest and improve public taste.

His æsthetic bent did not restrict itself to the visual arts. Not only was he interested in books but he had, too, qualities that might have made him a significant figure in contemporary letters had he been given a more drastic urge to write. Even his literary friends (and they were many) were struck by his powers of description; for he was able to touch



even the commonplace with a gift of fantasy, and had the gift of recreating scenes and episodes in word-pictures which were both unusually vivid and at the same time bizarre. *The Third Route*, his solitary published work, contains a few passages of high literary merit, notwithstanding a conscious attempt to be matter-of-fact, and the quotations at the heads of chapters indicate a reading that was at the same time wide, curious and discriminating.

His letters show a feeling for language and sometimes a very happy gift of phrase. "I am writing to you with my mouth full of biscuits and my heart full of thanks." "Of course, you must have more dogs—it is much safer to have a string or two to your canine bow." "A letter is like a roly-polly, only the middle counts." "There are no barriers between people save those that the imagination creates."

Hospitality, too, was an art to him—perhaps the one to which he was most passionately devoted: though it must be added that of all the arts it is the one which is most facilitated by a bottomless purse. The most famous men, the most beautiful women of the day were entertained by him in the flawless settings that he had brought into being at Park Lane, Trent Park, and Lympne: English princes, Ministers of State, Parliamentarians, soldiers, airmen, painters, men of letters. A house where Balfour, Boussus, Hewlett, Alice Dudeney, Shaw, Sargent and T. E. Lawrence (not to mention Charlie Chaplin) were among the visitors could not be commonplace; and the host whose invitations they accepted must have had far more to commend him than his wealth. But it was no question of lion-hunting. He appreciated

the honest Edwardian literary artist too: and even from the front he could write home to make contact with some writer—not a sensational popular favourite—whose novels he enjoyed. He or she would afterwards be included as a matter of course in his generous hospitality. King Edward VII's friendship with Sir Albert Sassoon was renewed by the grandsons of the two men. He was one of the intimate circle of Edward VIII, whether as Prince of Wales or after his accession to the Throne, entertained him frequently both in London and in the country, and gave a cinema party for him only a few days before his abdication. Similarly he entertained George VI at Trent Park before his accession, and lent the mansion to the Duke and Duchess of Kent for the second part of their honeymoon.

In such company and in these settings he displayed a hospitality to characterize which as lavish would be an absurd miosis. It was a hospitality which, whether in cuisine or in setting or in conversation or in companionship or in some unanticipated refinement was not quite like any to be encountered elsewhere. There was nothing in it of the heavy, pointless superabundant luxury—just the same as everyone else's save that there was more of it and that it was more costly—that London society had lapped up from his family in a former generation. His entertainments were different from those given by any other host, with exotic touches that in another setting and from another's hands would have appeared merely vulgar. They were shot through, to use the phrasing of his friend, Osbert Sitwell, with an elusive magic that will always live

in the memories of those present: memories of green clouds twisting in twilight woods, of panached trees and floodlit fountain.

It was an echo of this magnificence that came to the attentive ears of the outside world through the medium of a battalion of highly imaginative gossip-writers who found in it an endless source of inspiration and half-guineas. The public thus received the impression of an enormously wealthy sybarite of highly artistic temperament, remote from the sentiments and anxieties of ordinary humanity. The man in the street envied the man who had been born with the silver spoon in his mouth, and imagined that he enjoyed the feeling. The great tragedy of his life was that he did not. The popular impression was accentuated by an aloof manner, due more to shyness than to a feeling of superiority. He was essentially a simple soul, with a hatred for ostentation and a passion for the æsthetic pleasures of life. But the border-line between the ostentatious and the manifest is narrow, while æsthetic pleasures (whatever philosophers may say) are so much more easily to be attained by the wealthy than by the poor. Sassoon's means enabled him to indulge in them without regard to the cost; and who can blame him if he gave rein to this harmless, and not entirely selfish, passion, and if it attracted more attention from the public than he appreciated?

Below this hyper-civilized veneer there was, however, a simple, unsophisticated, retiring personality, very kindly, very sensitive, and above all, very lonely. His letters reveal a completely different Philip Sassoon from the spoiled Croesus of the journalistic

imagination—a man who lacked all rather than had all of the things that mattered in life. Sometimes, they are most revealing:

August 23rd, 1918.

I am well and happy—except occasionally for these causeless depressions that are forever floating about and fastening on to someone's heart. But then I suppose I am too capable of great happiness to be ever happy long. I envy the cow—both man and beast.

November 11th, 1919.

I have thought over so much that you said about pain going some day—and probing for it and not finding it. I hope that may be true, because no one can *want* to suffer.

February 4th, 1930.

I am a poor miserable creature and want too much from life. I must learn, in the words of Emily Brontë's immortal poem, that 'existence can be cherished, strengthened, and fed *without the aid of joy*.'

His friend's death in a flying accident in 1922 turned his mind to a somewhat morbid channel:

Life is so much more unsatisfactory for people like you and I, who always crave that those we love should give us more than they *know how to give*. It is a hopeless battle, but one never learns wisdom. . . . The sweets of life never make up for its blow. . . . I knew that you would suffer terribly—that is the penalty of having a heart and that is why people like you and I sometimes must envy those who haven't.

Or again:

This lonely, peaceful, *loved* landscape has made

me feel more anguished than ever, looking over the plains we used to fly over so often together. It is warm here—with a few snowdrops and primroses, and last autumn's berries on the sea-luck-thorns have survived my friend . . . I am so very miserable and see no light anywhere . . . The world seems to me like a blown egg and so very silent. A heart is a wretched business . . . I would give anything to rid myself of this load of anguish. . . .

He was capable of recognizing even the absurdity of the millionaire's privileges. True, he realized its advantages ("I hate all seasonable things", he once wrote, "and only care for skating if it comes in June or asparagus in December"), but he realized its paradoxicality as well. "In this huge house," he once told Lord Riddell when they were together at 25 Park Lane, "I occupy only four rooms. Sometimes I ask myself whether the State ought not to take the rest of the house for those who cannot otherwise secure houses." It was a sign of the times that such an idea should even have entered a millionaire's mind—though it may be wondered whether some stirring of the Biblical spirit of social justice in a remote descendant of the Prophets of Israel may not have been ultimately responsible.

Though he was at the head of a family that had made its reputation through commerce, and received the usual execration on that account from propagandists, Sir Philip Sassoon was anything but a City figure. Yet his strong sense of duty did not permit him to forget the claims of the family business, which had been commended to him in such pathetic terms in his father's will and his holding in which

was doubled under the terms of that of his cousin, David, in 1927. Accordingly, though in no sense of the term a man of affairs, he loyally collaborated in the business. On his father's death, when Frederick, the last surviving son of the original founder of the firm, had become Chairman, Philip joined the board of the directors. On his uncle's death in 1917, he succeeded him. While he was playing his part in politics, while he was shining as a host, he found time now and then to slip, rather shamefacedly, down to the offices of the ancestral firm, now in King William Street, and there to transact a minimum of such formal business as was necessary. But this was a question of necessity rather than of inclination, or even (it may be suspected) competence; and unlike the controlling figures of most other concerns of equal magnitude he steadfastly refused to interest himself in other businesses or to join the boards of subsidiary or associated enterprises.<sup>1</sup>

He suffered from a certain degree of obloquy because of his Jewish origin, especially in the days when German example and financial support had brought about a recrudescence of anti-Semitism in England. It was somewhat ironical, for his Jewish interests were minimal, restricting themselves to formal membership of a synagogue at which he was

<sup>1</sup> The Directors of David Sassoon and Company, Limited, at present (1940), are Messrs Cecil J. Longcroft, H. H. Sawyer and J. W. M. Maynard (no Chairman is specified). The two first mentioned are also directors of the African Mercantile Company, which clearly has certain affiliations with the Sassoon business. But the names are a further illustration of what has been referred to above, of what may be termed the progressive de-Judaization of businesses founded by Jews.

never seen and routine subscriptions to some Jewish charities in which he was not particularly interested. It was not only that he failed to identify himself with any vital Jewish cause, but that he performed almost incredible feats in order to dissociate himself from any tincture of Jewish sentiment in his public life. At the beginning of the Nazi regime in Germany, when the bestialities against the Jews had already commenced and decent men everywhere were beginning to avoid German contacts, he visited the German government in his official capacity as Under-Secretary for Air, and was entertained by Hermann Goering, his hands defiled by Jewish blood. This might be explained, if not excused. But it is impossible to extenuate his action in crossing the Atlantic in his usual sumptuous style during this period on one of the German luxury liners, thus not only helping to bolster up the economy of the Nazi regime but also entering into superfluous relations with men who would have made life impossible for him had he lived in Germany. He was, in fact, strangely blind to those Jewish loyalties, to which earlier generations of his family had been so devoted. Since it was impossible to conceal the fact that his family originated in India, he timorously allowed it to be put about that he was of Parsee extraction. (Few ordinary Englishmen knew what a Parsee was, but the term conveyed nothing of the snickering opprobrium that the ill-informed attach to Hebraic origin.) It was a pathetic phenomenon: as though there were anything but cause for overwhelming pride for a man to be descended from the great houses of Rothschild and Sassoon—great not

because of their wealth but because of their achievement—and at the same time to enjoy the glorious privilege of being both an Englishman and a Jew.

Yet this was perhaps the key to the enigma of his character. Profoundly English in sentiment, he was at the same time unmistakably Jewish in appearance, and abysmally ignorant of the Jewish heritage. He did not have sufficient knowledge to make him content to be what he was—an English Jew; yet his mirror, and the constant reminders of the world at large, did not permit him to forget the fact. Gifted, accomplished and wealthy, he might have hoped to reach the highest places in public life. That he did not do so, and remained in relatively subordinate positions, was probably due to defects of character and lack of executive force. He himself ascribed it, on the other hand, to what he considered the burden, but was in fact the priceless heritage, of his ancestral background. So intimately English, but not turned out of quite the same mould at his neighbours in the country and his colleagues at Westminster, he felt himself inequitably isolated in life, for all the hosts of acquaintances who were happy to accept his hospitality: and he moved about like a spectator, aloof and remote, on the stage on which he was supposed to be playing a part. A more careful training would have given him the confidence and the psychological balance which would have made him a happier and more successful man.

The same considerations were perhaps responsible for the fact that he, the most eligible bachelor in England, did not marry. Mixing though he did in a wholly non-Jewish environment, there could not



fail to be at the back of his mind a feeling that it was unfitting for the head of the house of Sassoon to set up anything but a Jewish household. He himself, of course, explained his celibacy more airily. "Did you not like my sister?" he wrote in 1917. "She is the most charming person in the world. I like her so much that I can never marry—she has set me too dizzy a standard." Whether this was the reason or (as people said) no, the results were heart-breaking to aspirant millionairesses. As a spiteful journalist poet put it at the time:

*Sir Philip Sassoon is the member for Hythe:  
He is opulent, swarthy and jejune and lithe . . .  
Beneficent angels announced at his birth,  
That Sir Philip Sassoon would inherit the earth . . .  
Sir Philip was always a double event,  
In Baghdad a banker, a yeoman in Kent . . .  
The homes he inhabits are costly but chaste  
(For Sir Philip Sassoon is unerring in taste),  
And the daughters of Britain will wish they were dead  
Once Philip Sassoon has decided to wed.*

He had undergone a slight operation in 1931:

May 2nd, 1931.

Had my tonsils yanked out and didn't like it at all. The doctors promised me four days' discomfort but as a matter of fact had eight days' agony. I hope for great things from it, though. Have lost a stone in weight and feel much better for it.

The permanent results were not as he had hoped. Thereafter, he was never quite the same active, mercurial personality as before. His father and mother had both died young, and his lot was to be

similar. His character changed. He lost something of his happy charm, his ebullience and his consideration for others; he became brusque to employees and subordinates, and even his own family came to find him imperious and overpowering. It was probably the outcome of the constant pain against which he fought.

He died, on June 4th, 1939, after a short illness, in his fifty-first year. The body was cremated next day, the ashes being subsequently taken up in an aeroplane and scattered over the luxurious grounds of Trent Park, his country house near Barnet. Minute particles were carried by the winds to the remote corners of the earth—to the Kentish marshes, where he had found happiness; to the wide spaces over which he had flown; to India, where the family had risen to fortune; and to Baghdad, where the first Sassoon had been Prince of the Captivity and whence his son David had escaped, a century and a decade before, to found the amazing house.

## ADDITIONAL NOTE

It was not easy to understand why on the landing of Edward, Prince of Wales, at Bombay in 1875, the Sassoon family was represented by Sir Albert's nineteen-year-old son Edward (who figures on the commemorative plaque on the base of the commemorative statue in front of the Town Hall), and not by the head of the family or one of his brothers (see page 87). But I have now noticed that the date, November 4th, was according to the Hebrew reckoning the anniversary of David Sassoon's death, when his children would not have permitted themselves any festive celebration even to meet royalty. It was the same consideration of filial piety, incidentally, that kept Leopold de Rothschild away from Epsom on the historic Derby Day when his St. Frusquin was beaten by the Prince of Wales's Persimmon (above, page 122).

The former Sassoon Mausoleum at Brighton (pages 165-6) is no longer a decorator's storehouse but now (November 1940) an Air Raid shelter :

Exotic structure, built for mortal clay,  
May prove a screen to keep the bombs away.

## INDEX

- ABERCORN, DUKE OF, 149  
 Abraham, Mrs. Aziza, 169  
 Adler, Dr. Hermann, 118  
 Aga Khan, 112  
 Ahmet Pasha, 21 ff.  
 Alexandra Mill, 100  
 Alington, Lord, 153  
 Alvie Lodge, 175  
 American Civil War, 50 ff., 96  
 Anglo-Jewish Association, 91, 133-6  
 Anspach, Cécilie (Baroness Gustava de Rothschild), 172  
 Armenians, 20, 31, 37  
 Arnhold, Brothers & Co., 225  
 Arnhold Trading Co., 227  
 Ashley House, 103-4  
 Ashley Park, 104, 192 ff., 205  
 Asquith, H. H., 159, 174  
 Asquith, Margot, 174, 182, 234  
 Astor, Waldorf, 199  
 Atherton, Gertrude, 233  
  
 BACK BAY COMPANY, 80  
 Baghdad, 17-36, 45, 48, 57, 96, 190-1, 249-59  
 Baghdad, Jews of, 17 ff., 57, 59  
 Baghdad, Plague of 1773 at, 25  
 Baldwin, Stanley, 247  
 Balfour, A. J., 79, 174, 176, 261, 264  
 Balfour, Lord, 181  
 Bandar Abbas, 35  
 Bank of China and Japan, 184  
 Barnato, Barney, 175  
 Basra, 26, 34-5, 47, 249  
 Bathurst, Lady, 197  
 Battersea, Lord, 121-2  
 Beddington, Claude, 73  
  
 Beer, Frederick Arthur, 195  
 Beer, Rachel, 195 ff.  
*Beit Abu-Rubin*, 24  
 Bene Israel, 58  
 Benjamin, Benjamin David, 102  
     —II., 192  
 Bennett, Arnold, 213  
 Bernhardt, Sarah, 200-1  
 Birkenhead, Lord, 235  
 Bischoffsheim, H. L., 222  
 Bomanji, Hormasji, 42  
 Bombay, Chapter II and *passim*  
 Bombay, Bank of, 52, 53, 90  
 Bombay, Town Hall, 68, 87  
 Bombay, University, 88  
 Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway, 43  
 "Bombay Bat," 54  
 Bombay Dyeing Company, 101  
 Bombay Spinning & Weaving Company, 75  
 Boyle, Sir Charles, 188  
 Boyle, Lady (Louise Sassoon), 188  
 Brighton, 90, 126 ff., 157 ff., 165-6, 167  
 British Museum, 262-3  
 Buckingham, Duke of, 193  
 Burnham, Lord, 117  
 Bushire, 35-6, 47  
 Bustani, 134  
 Byculla, 59, 67  
 Byculla Club, 116  
  
 CALCUTTA, 40  
 Canton, 49  
 Cassel, Sir Ernest, 145, 178-9  
 Catherine of Braganza, 37, 103

- Central College of Science, Bombay, 105
- Central Nursing Association, 104
- Chamberlain, Austen, 244
- Chamberlain, Joseph, 180
- Chamberlain, Neville, 254
- Channel Tunnel, 180 note
- Chao Yng-Cheng, 61
- Chaplin, C., 264
- Chartres, Duc de, 172
- China, 48 ff., 74, 90, 96, 98, 191, 224, 227 f.
- China, Jews of, 61-2
- Chinchpogli Cemetery, 67, 106 note
- Churchill, Winston, 176
- City of London School, 129
- Cleeve, Lucas, 79
- Coat-of-Arms, 134-5
- Cochin, 58
- Colaba, 80, 104
- Colombo, 96
- Connaught, Duke of, 167
- Cork, Earl of, 188
- Cotton Industry and Mills, 38, 50, 75, 92, 228
- Crewe, Marchioness of, 120
- Cust, Sir Lionel, 166
- Czartoryski, Prince, 172
- DAIRA SANIEH COMPANY, 178-9
- Daoud Pasha, 31 ff., 251
- David family, 40
- David, Sir Percival, 106
- David, Sir Sassoon, 106
- David Sassoon Benevolent Institution (Bombay), 60
- Davidson, Sir Arthur, 154-5
- Davis, Charles, 145
- Death Duties, 183-4
- Devonshire, Duke of, 124, 152
- Disraeli, Benjamin, Earl of Beaconsfield, 121, 207, 208
- Disraeli, Coningsby, 208
- d'Israeli, Isaac, 208
- Dudeney, Mrs. Alice, 264
- Durham, Lord, 233
- EAST INDIA COMPANY, 35, 38, 58, 193
- Eastern Bank, 102
- Edinburgh, Duke of, 87-8
- Edward VII, 73, 81, 85, 87, 113 ff., Chapter VI, 166, 222
- Edward VIII, 246, 265
- El-Kifl, 62
- Elphinstone, Mountstuart, 37-8
- Elphinstone High School, 86-7
- England, 50
- Esher, Lord, 149, 236
- Eulalie, Infanta, 133
- Evening Times, *The*, 182
- Exilarch. *See* Nasi
- Ezekiel family, 40, 118
- Ezekiel, David, 148
- Ezra Family, 40, 168
- Ezra, Alfred, 169
- Ezra, Sir Alwyn, 169
- Ezra, Sir David, 169
- Ezra, Elias David, 169
- FEISUL, KING, 251
- Ferguson, Sir James, 87
- Fife, Duke of, 153, 157
- Fitzgerald, Derek Barrington, 222, 224-5
- Fitzgerald, Lady, 222
- Fletcher, Sir Henry, 193
- Foch, Marshal, 245
- Forbes & Co., 42
- Freedom of City, 88-9
- French, Lord, 235, 245
- Frere, Sir Bartle, 65
- Fricourt, 213
- GAMA, VASCO DA, 39
- Gaster, Moses, 178
- George IV, 157
- George V, 105, 166
- George VI, 265
- Gideon, Sampson, 89
- Glyn, Mills & Co., 79
- Gosse, Edmund, 211, 216
- Grand National, 221

- Grant, Sir Robert, 43  
 Graves, Robert, 214  
 Great India Peninsula Railway, 43  
 Grey, Sir Edward, 182  
 Gubbay family, 27, 87, 117, 118, 169  
 Gubbay, Abraham, 27  
 Gubbay, Amam, 27  
 Gubbay, Mrs. David, 263  
 Gubbay, Ezekiel ibn Rahel, 30 ff.  
 Gubbay, Ezra, 31  
 Gubbay, Luna, 188  
 Gubbay, Rachel, 169  
 Gunzburg, Baron de, 194
- HARG, Sir Douglas, 213, 235, 237-8  
 Hallat Effendi, 30  
 Hardoon, Silas Aaron, 100  
 Hardy, Thomas, 217  
 Hart, Sir Israel, 179  
*Hebrath Beth David*, 59  
 Heligoland, 131  
 Herzl, Theodor, 178  
 Hirsch, Baron de, 121, 145-6  
 Hoare, Sir Samuel, 247, 248  
 Hamburg, 153  
 Hong Kong, 48, 49, 65, 90, 96, 148, 224  
 Hooghly, 76  
 Hooley, E. T., 145  
 Horne, Sir Robert, 246  
 Hugh Lindsay, 42  
 Hugo, Victor, 200-1  
 Hyeem, Farraj, 48, 71  
 Hyeem, Mrs. J. M., 22, 167  
 Hythe, 179, 234
- IMPERIAL BANK OF PERSIA (IRAN), 79, 178, 184  
 Imperial and Foreign Investment Corporation, 185  
 Imperial Telegraphs, 181  
 Indian Mutiny, 50, 65  
 Institute of Journalists, 197  
 Institute of Women Journalists, 197  
 Inter-marriage, 201 f.  
 Inter-Parliamentary Union, 181
- Isaacs, Simon, 101  
 Isaacs, Rachel. *See* Sassoon, Lady Jacobs.
- JACOB, SOLOMON, 57  
 Japan, 49, 64  
 Jehoiachin, 23  
 Jajibhai, Sir Jamsetji, 82, 89  
 Jajibhai, Rustamji, 51, 52, 82  
 Jewish Colonisation Association, 146  
 Joffre, Marshal, 236  
 Johannesburg, 162 *note*  
 Joseph ibn Susan, 21-2  
 Joseph, Abdullah, 32, 72  
 Joseph, Hannah, 32. *See* Sassoon, Hannah  
 Judæo-Arabic, 55
- KAI-FUNG-FOO; 61-2  
 "Kain, Saul," 211  
 Karachi, 99  
 Kazaz-Aretun, 31  
 Kent, Duke and Duchess of, 265  
 King's Cliff, 159  
 Kitchener, Lord, 236  
 Knollys, Lord, 149-150  
 Kruger, Paul, 162 *note*
- LAING, Samuel, 126  
 Lambert, Baroness Léon, 173  
 Lamington, Lord, 104-5  
 Lancashire Relief Fund, 65  
 Landauer, Gustave, 119  
 Lawrence, T. E., 249-50, 264  
 Lawson family, 117  
 Lee, Lord, 263  
 Leghorn, 55  
 Levy, Joseph Moses, 117  
 Lewis, Sir George, 146  
 Lipton, Sir Thomas, 148  
 Liverpool, 50  
 Lloyd George, David, 183, 241, 243 ff., 262  
 Loder, Lady, 158  
 London, 50, 88-9, 106

- London School of Economics, 83  
 Londonderry, Lord, 247  
 Lopez family, 134  
 Lowji Castle, 42  
  
 MAHABALESHWAR, 84, 103-4  
 Mahrattas, 37  
 Malabar Coast, 39  
 Malabar Hill, 91  
 Mametz Wood, 213  
 Manchester, 50 ff., 225  
 Mantua, 119  
 Maple, Sir Blundell, 148  
 Marasal, M., 245  
 Marlborough House, 161  
 Marrot, Mrs. (Rachel Sassoon), 188  
 Meyer family, 40  
 Middlesex Hospital, 129  
 Millerand, M., 244-5  
 Moise (Moses), Meir, 73  
 Molesey, G. T., 86  
 Moses, Mrs. Mayer (Amam Sassoon), 167  
 Munich, 233  
 Murad IV, Sultan, 18  
 Mutlah river, 76  
 Myers, F. W. H., 176  
  
 NADIR SHAH, 34  
 Nasi, 22 ff, 134 *note*, 135  
 Nepean Lodge, 91  
 Newmarket, 155  
 Northbrook, Lord, 85  
 Northcliffe, Lord, 199, 236, 237  
  
 Observer, *The*, 196 ff.  
 O'Hagan, Lord, 159  
 Opium Trade, 47 and *note*  
 Orford, Lord, 78 *note*  
 Oriental Life Assurance Co., 78  
 Orta, Garcia d', 57  
  
 PAGET, LADY WALPURGA, 145  
 Paintings, 260 ff.  
 Palestine, 55, 64  
 Paris, 172, 200, 245  
  
 Parsees, 37, 42, 51, 57, 81-4, 270  
 Pastel Society, 177  
 Persia, 34-6, 46-7, 64  
 Persia, Shah of, 132-3  
 Perugia family, 119, 144  
 Perugia, Achille, 119  
 Pius XI, Pope, 252  
 Poona, 65-6, 68, 84  
 Pope. See Pius XI  
 Port Canning, 76-8  
 Port Lympne, 243 ff., 259  
 Premchand, Roychand, 51, 52  
 Prince of Captivity. See *Nasi*  
 Prince's Dock, Bombay, 81  
 Prince Consort, 66, 67, 73  
 Prince of Wales Fire Insurance Co., 78  
  
 QUAKERS, 202  
  
 RACING, 125, 155  
 Raphael, Edward, 119  
 Raphael, Ernest, 188  
 Raphael, Jeanette. See Sassoon, Jeanette  
 Repington, Colonel, 235  
 Resh Galutha. See *Nazi*  
 Reuben, Solomon, 191  
 Ribblesdale, Lord, 246  
 Riddell, Lord, 245, 246, 268  
 Ritchie, Steuart & Co., 42  
 Roborough, Lord, 134  
 Rocksavage, Lady (Sybil Sassoon), 184, 229 ff., 245, 262  
 Rocksavage, Lord, 230  
 Rosebery, Lady (Hannah Rothschild) 120  
 Rosebery, Lord, 120, 124, 130  
 Rothenstein, Sir William, 237  
 Rothschild family, 27-8, 40, 43, 70-1, 95, 168, 173 ff., 179, 190, 208, 251, 260, 274  
 Rothschild, Alfred de, 145  
 Rothschild, Ferdinand de, 145 and *note*  
 Rothschild, Gustave de, 171-2, 242

- Rothschild, James de, 185  
 Rothschild, Leopold de, 120-1, 122,  
     125, 144, 145, 155, 166  
 Rothschild, Mrs. Leopold de (Maria  
     Perugia) *ibid*  
 Rothschild, Mayer de, 120, 179  
 Rothschild, Nathaniel de, 1st Lord  
     Rothschild, 145  
  
 SALOMON, SIR DAVID, 90  
 Salomons, Philip, 160  
 Salisbury, Lord, 131  
 Sandgate, 174-5, 242  
 Sandringham, 130  
 Sargent, John, 176, 177, 229, 237,  
     262  
 Sassoon ben Saleh, 21-35  
 SASOON  
     Aaron, 66, 72, 90, 185-6, 209  
     Abraham, 22  
     Albert (Abdullah) Sir, 45, 48, 71,  
         72 ff., Chapters III and V and  
         *passim*, 105, 142-3, 159, 165,  
         169, 172, 186, 209  
     Alfred, 106  
     Alfred Ezra, 202 ff.  
     Alice (Lady Edward), 171 ff., 233-  
         4, 262  
     Amam, 71  
     Amam (Mrs. Mayer Moses), 167  
     Arthur Abraham, 48, 72, 90,  
         118 ff., 161-2, 166, 185, 191,  
         209  
     Aziza, 169  
     David, 27, 31-6, Chapter II and  
         *passim*  
     David (Fourth generation), 205  
     David Elias, 99, 106, 187  
     David Reuben, 187-8, 269  
     David Solomon, 139  
     Sir Edward Albert, 87, 170 ff.,  
         233-4, 261  
     Sir Edward Elias, 99, 100, 106,  
         187, 223  
     Elias David, 48, 53, 71, 95 ff.,  
         Chapter IV, 165, 167, 209  
     Eugénie (Mrs. Arthur), 119 ff.,  
         140, 143, 144, 154 ff.  
     Mrs. Flora (Farha), wife of David  
         Sassoon, 48, 71-2, 92-3  
     Mrs. Flora (Farha), wife of  
         Solomon, 191  
     Flora, daughter of Reuben  
         Sassoon. *See* Raphael  
     Frederick (Farraj), 48, 72, 119,  
         127, 167, 184-5, 188, 209, 269  
     Hamo Watts, 204  
     Hannah (Mrs. David), 32, 71  
     Hannah (Lady Albert), 73  
     Hannah (Lady Sassoon David),  
         106  
     Sir Jacob, 97-106  
     Jeanette (Mrs. Frederick), 118,  
         118  
     Joseph Albert, 170  
     Joseph Elias, 106  
     Joseph Sassoon, 194, 204-5  
     Kate, 72  
     Kate (Mrs. Reuben), 148-9  
     Louise. *See* Lady Boyle  
     Mazal-Tob (Mrs. David), 71, 109  
     Mazal-Tob. *See* Hyeem, Mrs.  
     Meyer, 99, 106, 186-7, 219, 221  
     Meyer, Mrs., 130, 169 and *ubi*  
         *supra*  
     Mozelle, 129. *See* Mazal-Tob,  
         Mrs. Meyer Sassoon  
     Muriel Hélène, 169  
     Nissim, 106  
     Sir Philip, 170, 184, 229-30,  
         Chapter X  
     Rachel (Lady Jacob) 101, 103  
     Rachel, daughter of Sassoon  
         Sassoon. *See* Beer, Rachel.  
     Rachel, daughter of Reuben  
         Sassoon. *See* Marrot, Mrs.  
     Rebecca, 72  
     Reginald, 219 ff.  
     Reuben, 48, 72, 107, 117, 124 ff.,  
         148 ff., 166, 167, 172, 185  
     Ronald, 184  
     Sarah, 106



- Sassoon, David, 48, 50, 108 ff.,  
     165, 187 and Chapter VII  
 Sassoon Joseph, 205  
 Siegfried, 197, 204, 211 ff., 238  
 Solomon, 48, 72, 90-2, 165  
 Solomon, Mrs. *See* Sassoon, Mrs.  
     Flora  
 Sybil. *See* Rocksavage, Lady  
 Theresa, Georgina Thornycroft  
     (Mrs. Alfred), 203 f.  
 Sir Victor, 107, 219, 222 ff.,  
 Violet Leah. *See* Fitzgerald,  
     Derek Barrington  
 Sassoon Benevolent Institution,  
     61  
 Sassoon Dock (Bombay), 80-1  
 Sassoon Infirmary and Hospital  
     (Poona), 65-6, 104, 105  
 Sassoon Mechanics' Institute  
     (Bombay), 65, 68, 85, 104  
 Sassoon Reformatory, 65, 104  
 Sassoon Talmud Torah, 59, 67  
 Schiller, Ferdinand, 76  
 Schroeder, Henry & Co., 79  
 Schuster family, 115  
 Seattle, 41  
 Semah, Joseph, 57 *note*  
 Semi-Gotha, 29  
 Semon, Sir Felix, 146  
 Sert, J. M., 259  
 Shanghai, 48, 49, 61-2, 90, 191, 224  
 Share mania at Bombay, 51-3, 76  
 Shannon, Viscount, 193  
 Shaw, George Bernard, 264  
 Shechita, 60  
 Silva, Diego da, 103  
 Simpson, Mrs., 192  
 Singapore, 40  
 Sitwell, Osbert, 265-6  
 Skinner, John, 42  
 Slave Pashas, 18 ff.  
 Sneyd, Mrs., 130  
 Snowden, Philip, 216  
 Solomon ibn Susan, 21  
 "Souls, The", 173-4  
 Speyer family, 115  
 Steinschneider, Moritz, 60  
 Stern family, 115  
 Suez, 42  
 Suez Canal, 74, 80, 251  
 Suleiman Pasha, Vali of Baghdad,  
     26 ff.  
 Sunday Times, 197 ff.  
 Swaraj, 226, 227  
 Swinton, Lord, 247  
  
 TATA FAMILY, 82-4, 102  
 Telegraphy, 180-1  
 Temple, Sir Richard, 53  
 Third Route, The, 251  
 Thirkell, I. G., 102  
 Thornycroft family, 203, 217  
 Tilden, P. A., 243, 259  
 Trent Park, 175, 242, 253, 259  
 Trieste, 119  
 Tulchan Lodge, 128-9, 154 ff.  
  
 UZIELLI, MAJOR, 237  
  
 VENIZELOS, M., 245  
 Victoria and Albert Museum,  
     Bombay, 66, 67  
  
 WALLACE COLLECTION, 263  
 Walpole, Lady Georgina, 78 *note*  
 Walton-on-Thames, 129, 193  
 Wellington, Duke of, 167  
 Wells, H. G., 176  
 Weygand, General, 245  
 Wilhelm II, 162 *note*  
 Wilson, John, 63  
 Wolff, Sir Henry Drummond, 78-9  
 Wolff, Joseph, 78 *note*  
 Woolner, Thomas, R. A., 68, 193  
 Worms family, 115  
  
 YELLOW PERIL, 180  
 Yokohama, 49  
  
 ZANZIBAR, SULTAN OF, 131-2  
 Zoffany, 259





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